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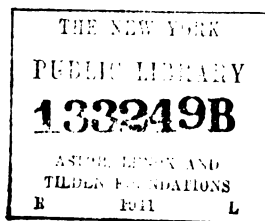
BY

W. DOUGLAS NEWTON

AUTHOR OF "GREEN LADIES," "WESTWARD WITH
THE PRINCE OF WALES," "THE
WAR CACHE," ETC.



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TO
EDIE AND JOHNNY

25 JAN



LOW CEILINGS

CHAPTER I

I

IN the holiday following my last days at school my brother Owen and I went adventuring among the "common" people.

It was an inconspicuous evening outing, but actually it came to mean much. It was, as it were, the moment when the first tiny crack appeared in the solemn and immense social fabric of ours which my sister Beatrice was already scornfully dubbing the "low-ceiling" state. It was the evening when we first met Hugh. That is why I remember it. That is why I begin with it. Of course, even before this, Bee was showing a disturbing inclination to use her own mind, instead of the corporate mind of The Hill, in her outlook on life. She was kicking over the traces—that was how Hugh came in.

I had definitely left school, but was still wearing the aura of my school, as I still wore the red school cap, and would do until, in September, I entered the office of Hall Milne and Baddick, to whom I was articled as an architect's clerk. Then I would adopt a bowler hat as I would a new set of man-of-the-world views. Just then I was in the chrysalis stage, rather more of a superior person than I should be presently, and not so important socially.

Owen, who was to remain at school another year, came with me, as there happened to be nothing athletic that

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evening to hold his mind and exercise his biceps, and we went among the coster barrows of Camberwell Gate and the Walworth Road.

It was before the day when the London County Council had banished these hucksters from this main street, before the electric trams and the motor busses had come along to make their calling not merely profitable but exciting. Their barrows edged the sidewalk in a solid ribbon, and one could push along the crowded, narrow pavement between the shops, and these naphtha-lit stalls that formed the open-air market, with something of the thrill of an adventure into strange barbaric wilds.

That was why we went. We went feeling that we were rather like bold tamers entering a giant cage full of savage animals, or that we were travelers pushing deep into the perils of a cannibal land. That was our attitude. These people were not human. They were outside the pale—"blags" as we called them at our school. We went among them feeling both our superiority and our fear of them. We liked to think that these aborigines threatened danger. They were reported to be overwilling to "dot you one on the snitch," or to "plug one on the lug." We understood that they had an infinite capacity for "pinching" one's watch somewhere about the level of the first barrow, and selling it back to one before one reached the last in the line. It was said that a man went into this extempore market with a dog on a lead, and only realized that it was no longer following him when a hoarse-voiced coster endeavored to sell it back to him. Wild stories—but we liked to believe them. They gave superior people like us a sense of thrill. The fact that ragged, dirty-nosed little urchins called after us "Over-grown school boys," if we wore caps, or "Yah, 'oo robbed the donkey o' its feed," if we wore straw hats, increased these emotions.

It was always a striking scene. The vivid lighting of



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the shops joined the bright, orange flame that came from the naphtha flares. These flares were rather fascinating things in themselves. They were inverted tin cones, running into a thin pipe with a rough burner at the end. To light them, the costers built a small bonfire of papers and thrust the burners into the flames. When they were really alight, they hung them about their stalls, where they hissed and spurted huge flames, and sometimes dropped snakes of burning oil that the men, clay pipe in mouth, regarded with the utmost unconcern, though their wares might be highly inflammable.

Under this poignant light were the heaped-up barrows: amazing massings of shining fruit; of fish; of old tools; of millinery, such as servants buy, spread out on the lattice backs and tilts of the stalls; of flowers displayed in radiant clusters; of funeral wreaths and glass-cased immortal flowers—for the coster has a passion for obsequies; of seeds; of cheap toys; of meat, even, and a thousand other things all combining to make a picture scarcely less moving and colored than could have been seen in the romantic bazaars of Damascus and Bagdad. . . . Only being in London we never thought of comparing it with Damascus and Bagdad.

The stalls were presided over by people scarcely less romantic—if one had eyes to see. All the men had knotted handkerchiefs round their necks—generally red and yellow—whether they were young or old. All the women had fabulous hats in which bloomed amazing feathers, and wore white aprons and long, black fur coats, rather depilated and shiny from use, if it were cold—and quite often if it 'wasn't. And when these women were young they were often lovely. They had the small-boned faces and the vivid color in their cheeks of the true Londoner. Their features were neat and piquant. Their hair was puffed and fringed low over the eyes, giving them a dark and

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enigmatic sparkle, and athwart their faces heavy gold earrings swung. There was an alert, flickering vivacity about them. Their wit was coarse and utterly destructive in its keenness. "Yer don't like me 'addicks, yer don't like me price, yer ain't goin' ter buy nuthin' . . . well, take yer baby's bottom off me barrer," was a shaft I once overheard. Like the men, these women wore knotted handkerchiefs round their throats—throats that would remain slim and quite beautiful, as would their plangent good looks, until hard conditions, drink and too many babies would wreck them into the unspeakable bosominess and blowsiness of the fat old women of the early thirties who presided over many stalls. And coarse though they were, there was about them a decorum, an aristocracy of their kind. Their wit might be loose, but there was no lightness about them. There was a relentless chastity and faithfulness in them, however hard their conditions, and they had an aloof social outlook. For a coster to marry outside the tribe—well, as we would say of a similar lapse among us—it wasn't done.

But we did not appreciate that. To us they were just "blags."

The men, either Buddha-like or shouting with a dervish fervor the wonder and cheapness of their goods, were interesting, too. The famous pearlies were vanishing, but now and then a bright-colored braided coat with monstrous buttons set sometimes in cabalistic design round the pockets survived, and the curious, big-peaked and floppy cap remained to point to the glories that the onslaught of the bowler hat had wiped out.

And these men had a genius of persuasion in their craft whether they shouted the merits of their savoy or pigs' feet or jellied heels from stalls, or stood on upturned boxes and bawled the omnipotent healing qualities of raw-colored medicines in tuppenny bottles. . . . These fellows

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generally stood in the side streets, the streets that plunged dimly back into dark areas of mean houses, piled in a sodden mass between here and the Old Kent Road, from which people streamed to see and fight for bargains.

From these dark cañons into the tawny light and the Oriental color and movement of Camberwell Gate came women with men's caps on tight drawn hair, old women with pinched faces in capes, young women in blouses that almost called aloud, with young, over-soft faces and voices ready to scream in mirth at the slightest excuse. Here were the neat wives of clerks who had slipped out from Camberwell and the grayly respectable streets stretching towards Kennington, bent on embittered bargainings—women with the tight, hard looks of those who have to keep a level of respectability above their income, "The Souls in Purgatory," Bee called them. With working class wives moved men, placid, smoking, ruminative, sometimes carrying the market basket, sometimes carrying the latest baby, sometimes carrying both. Sometimes there were women who were obviously servants from places like The Hill, for Camberwell Gate was not only celebrated for its cheapness, but also for the excellence of its goods.

All these people mixed and mingled tightly under the flares of the lights, moving slowly in a continuous shuffle along the pavements, stopping and bargaining with the vendors, paying very little attention to the constant shouts of the hoarse voices, but occasionally fighting for price with an acid repartee that matched the costers'. And the costers kept up their continual patter, sometimes droll, sometimes florid, sometimes scornful, sometimes congratulatory, as imperturbable dames fingered and left, or fingered and bought their goods. They would continue their patter even as they fished great handfuls of coin—mainly gold and silver—from their high fly pockets,

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calling attention to the waiting world that Ma here knew a good thing when she sor it. . . .

II

So against the shuttling background of slow horse trams and the passing of green-painted horsed busses from Peckham, this Arabian Night of South London daily occurred, and this night Owen and I went down into it with the air of two superior caliphs bent on tasting its strange fantasies.

We left the neat, newish, red-bricked and palpably proper roads of The Hill, and walked down Denmark Hill, a road that seemed to us to be dingy, but it had its romantic memory. When Ruskin lived hereabouts, and before, here on this urban slope behind the trees lived the City magnates, from here they set out in their smart carriages to drive through the Walworth Road past the Elephant and Castle to their offices in the then far distant town. Their homes even now remain, gracious houses in a graceful Georgian style, with fine porches and dignified steps. But even at that time the speculative builder was busy on them, and further up the slope, among the large houses with splendid grounds, the keepers of Boarding Establishments for City Gentlemen were already blossoming.

We walked by Camberwell Green and the Old Father Red Cap public house and along the dingy road until we came to the skirmishing fringes of the stalls. Here we dawdled, pushing on into the pack of people that clotted between them and the shops, pausing now and then to watch some more than outrageous salesman at his antics. We were consciously aloof. We were creatures from another planet adventuring among the "blags." Owen was secretly inflating his chest and bulking his biceps and

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hoping for some quick, romantic blow that would settle the hash of a bulky cad in the best school-tale manner.

But adventures were few. Nobody seemed to notice our peculiar aloofness; we passed as ordinary in that ruck of avid and businesslike people. Once I thought Owen's biceps might be brought into play. A weedy looking man at a stall in the middle of an automatic and impassioned demonstration of a paste that would polish both furniture and cutlery snarled, "'Ere, you boys get 'art of it . . . 'op it. 'Op it, d'y' 'ear?"

The mess of children about his knees vanished, dodging amid the legs of the crowd with a miraculous celerity. He took up his hoarse tale, caught sight of us, broke off:

"Goin' to buy ennythin'? Nar? Well, grease it. See! Grease it. . . . Don't surpose you c'd get at lil' baby Willie's bank ter steal 'is fardins this time. . . . Ma was lookin', wuz she?"

"That's not funny," I said loftily.

"Hey. . . . Strike me . . . 'ere, 'op it, before I fetches yer a wipe on th' dial. . . ."

I thought I was bigger than he was. I thought Owen and his biceps were more redoubtable. I was ready to give him what he would call "mouth." Owen tugged me away.

"Look out," he growled. "Look at the blighter's ears. . . . He's a boxer. . . ."

We 'opped it. We drifted rather damply through the crowd. Nothing really happened until Owen said in tones of disgust,

"I sa-ay, well, I'm jiggered . . . Bee!"

"Good Lord," I cried, with his outraged air. "Bee? Where?"

"She's with some sort of chap," said Owen, faintly and tribally hostile to the "chap," whoever he was.

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"Who? . . . I say, where are they?"

"Oh, some scraggy ass. . . . I don't know him. Bit of a scrawn he seems. They're over there, beyond the butter shop, against that stall, the dark one."

Suddenly through the shifting heads I saw my sister at a stall. Beside her was a tall, rather lank youth I did not know. I cried out, not because I had doubted Owen, but to mark the unconstitutional aspect of Bee's presence in this place.

"She is there, Well, I say . . . a bit thick." I was faintly aghast, as Owen had been aghast. For a girl, a decent, well-dressed girl of one of the nicest families on The Hill to be in this rialto of the riffraff—well, decidedly it was not at all the thing. If some one saw her, what would people say? . . .

"Do you know who the lanky merchant is?" asked Owen in a starchy voice.

"Not from Adam. He looks a bit of a freak."

"Must be . . . to bring a girl here," snorted Owen.

But we both knew that probably Bee had brought him here.

It was that last knowledge that made us stand wondering what our duty was in this social crisis. Bee was older than we were, but that wouldn't have impressed us, for, after all, she was a girl and therefore spiritually younger than any more or less contemporary, worldly-wise male. The delicacy of the situation arose from the fact that Bee was decisively Bee. Bee was slightly devastating. She had a cataclysmic candor enabling her to say outright things which other people merely thought. We both were aware of this side of her, and we knew that to face her now would be to run the risk of her quite direct opinion on interfering brothers. Our instinct was to sidle off and leave her well alone. A large man carrying a sack of potatoes cannoned Owen against a shop

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with a lack of interest and vituperation and apology that seemed cruelly contemptuous of our caste.

"Bit rough down here," growled Owen darkly, twisting his wrist to exercise his forearm muscles and scowling after the coldly contemptuous navvy. "Never know what might happen. . . . And that fellow with Bee looks a bit of a weed."

Nothing would have happened, of course, but the feeling that we were the protectors of Bee against the aborigines of Camberwell Gate filled us with a stern elation. We shoved through the crowd towards her.

She was standing by a stall lit by small, tin, wick lamps instead of the usual flares. Half of the stall was devoted to music in paper covers.

Piano-scores of waltz tunes, Tosti, and the master-songs of many comedians were displayed broadly on the canvas back or hung from the canvas roof, or were spread neatly over the stall itself. The other half was given over to the native musical instruments of the place: mouth organs, jews'-harps, tin whistles, ocarinas, an old flute or two, one violin, some triangles, many small, square boxes of fiddle and banjo strings, a couple of banjos and several accordions.

We went and stood by Bee, and she paid not the slightest attention to us. I had to say, "Hallo, Bee," and even then she only looked up and nodded and returned her attention to what was happening at the stall. And it was the gravity about this which struck us as "all wrong." If only Bee had treated the thing as "a lark," as we did, if she had only treated the old man at the stall as some one from whom to extract "sport," we should not have been outraged at her behavior. But she didn't. She was treating the old man whose spectacles were mended with string, and who wore a red and white choker,

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gravely, as though he were one of ourselves. And the youth with her had the same air. It was indecent.

The old man had an accordion in his hands. He was playing on it soberly, staring out over our heads. He plowed steadily forward through some sort of tune, quite oblivious of the small crowd that had gathered to listen and look on. Bee and the youth were also oblivious. They were watching the old man in a manner which was inhumanly solemn. It was nothing to them that the crowd was there and making comment, and that one girl from a mantle factory was saying something, giggling about "them there toffs."

"I say, Bee," said the young man briskly. "I like it. It really has an effect. I'm going to buy one."

"What's that tune the old boy is playing?" demanded Owen of Bee, to draw her attention to his presence. "Seem to know it."

"Handel," said Bee, without looking round, as though Handel from a coster's fingers at a coster's stall in Camberwell Gate was just an ordinary matter. She said to her companion, "Try that fat one over there—look. It has double stopping."

The huckster on the stall handed over the fat one. The calm, matter-of-fact air of them all was disturbing. It seemed to them all, the old man who sniffed regularly, mainly to keep his degenerate spectacles in place, as well as Bee and the young man, a matter of no social significance. It did not apparently occur to them how scandalized nice people of The Hill would be at such a happening.

With a ghastly naturalness the tall man who had the effrontery to call my sister Bee picked up the big and wobbly accordion. "This right?" he asked of the man, and allowed the old fellow to guide his hands with palpably dirty fingers. Curious noises came out of the in-

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strument. "Blimey," said the old man. "'Alf a mo'. . . . Nar, not that wiy, you've got 't wrong . . . 'ere!" The sounds flowed into a smooth melody. "Got it," said the young man, grinning gently. "Wive it," said the old man. "Wive it up an' darn." He waved an imaginary accordion up and down, the young man imitated him. . . . They seemed to caper to each other. The factory girls giggled.

But the young man played and waved calmly, and presently a delicate tune held us. We all listened. "I like it, Bee," cried the young man. "I do like it."

"Nice lil' toon," said the old man. "Noo ter me. Wot might be its nime?"

"It's a saraband by Bach," said the young man. We looked at the old boy; he took it calmly, not conscious that he was having his leg pulled. We looked at Bee and her companion. They accepted Bach in the Walworth Road just as they had accepted Handel from a hawker. They were almost gruesomely cool.

They went on talking to the old man about his accordions. Owen and I became conscious that as upholders of the social status we were suffering from neglect. The young man, still unashamed of having made an exhibition of himself in public, refused to pay the price the stall-keeper asked. There was an unabashed and brutal haggling, in which the onlookers took a personal interest, which made both Owen and I wish the earth might open under our feet. Presently they hit a compromising sum, and I saw, to my astonishment, both pleasure and admiration in the old coster's face. He had enjoyed the bout. He handed over the accordion. "Wrop it hup, shall I?" He reached for a sporting paper of clamative tint.

"Well. . . ." said the young man.

"That pink won't match my coat—or yours," said Bee.

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"All right, I'll carry it as it is," smiled the young man. He tucked the instrument in its appalling nakedness under his arm, and with a cheery word of farewell moved away. He was neither excited nor speculative at our presence. His calmness hurt.

We kept step for a few paces.

"I say, Bee," said Owen, in a tone of protest, "what are you doing here?"

"Buying an accordion," said Bee.

"Don't be a thorough ass, Bee," said I. "We mean, why on earth did you come to a place like this?"

"To buy an accordion," said Bee. We stood and stuttered.

"Look here, that's all jolly fine——" I began.

"See you at supper," said Bee. "Four of us can't walk together on a crowded pavement like this."

We didn't. Bee and the young man went off into the crowd. We stood helplessly.

"It's all jolly fine," said Owen, "but that sort of thing is a bit thick in a girl. I mean, down here among all these 'blags.' . . . And who's the fellow she's picked up?"

("That's a bloke who knows wot's wot," we heard the old man telling a crony. He was referring to Bee's young man.)

We were galled to feel that we did not even know the fellow's name, and that Bee hadn't taken the trouble to introduce us, and, more than anything, that he himself did not seem to be concerned at the lack. This seemed to be the crown of "wrongness." If there was anything we and our kind did demand it was to know where we were.

And when we tackled Bee—by ourselves, since this matter must not go further—she scoffed at our propieties.

"Don't be suffocating, Donald," she said, "you and your stuffy ideas. . . . Why don't you wake up, break

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away from this fuggy atmosphere of ours. . . . You've got it in you at least. . . ."

"Because I object to your doing the sort of thing that people like us don't do? . . ."

"Oh, dry up," snapped Bee. "You've got The Hill ideal in your bones. You'll be a bolster to the end of your days, an inert, spiritless, shapeless, moral bolster conforming to every pressure of convention. . . ."

"But girls don't do that sort of thing, you know," put in Owen.

"I do," said Bee. "And I'm going to keep on doing it."

III

This was our first knowledge of Hugh Bernard, a factor of immense disturbance to our stagnant atmosphere.

Beatrice, who never hurried over anything, not even the grand passion, brought him to the house a little later. Beatrice was not merely cool and calm, her coolness had something of the glacier in its slow, steady determination. She introduced Hugh in characteristic fashion.

She brought him home from the Guildhall School of Music, where she was studying, one evening. She told us he was a friend, Hugh Bernard; nothing more. Then she left him high and dry on Owen for the rest of the evening while she played Boston whist with me. We were in the drawing-room, where that altar of all the social rites, the grand piano, had its sanctuary, but she never hinted that Hugh played the piano or composed songs.

Owen, after that *outré* encounter in Camberwell Road, was inclined to be on his guard against low and disturbing instincts in Hugh's composition. Gradually, however, Hugh's almost ingenuous naturalness wore down opposi-

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tion, and when my brother found that Hugh could speak of footwork in the boxing ring in a manner quite worthy of the subject, that he had evidently done some running, and was familiar with other sports, we all came to treat him as one of us—that is, until we learned he was a composer, and we became shocked and scared.

He appeared in the house several times, and it was apparent that he went about with Beatrice. They went on curiously cool pilgrimages to the Promenade Concerts at Queen's Hall, to Soanes Museum in Lincoln's Inn and to other queer places. My mother had even said on several occasions, employing that pointed casualness which was supposed to have a restraining effect, "What! Been out with Mr. Bernard *again*, Bee?" Generally it was becoming apparent that Beatrice was seeing too much of the fellow.

He was a decent chap, we thought, but there was already beneath our affability that subtle attitude of hostility which many people of our kind do feel towards men who show signs of wanting to marry their sisters.

Then, one night, another visitor asked Bee to sing, and she had said,

"Yes, I can sing to-night," with an air of assurance that always seemed bragging and jarring. "What will you have?"

"I want *The Lotus Eater's Song*," I said; "that is, if nobody else minds. It's jolly pretty." I turned to the nearest person to obtain support of my choice. It happened to be Hugh. "It's a ripping little song. Do you know it?"

And Beatrice had answered startlingly,

"He ought to. He wrote it. Come along, Hugh, you'd better play the old thing yourself."

He sat down, and we were aware that, under his ordi-

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nary, pleasant Public Schoolboy exterior, there lurked the deeps not merely of a composer but of a pianist of sparkling gift.

Without doubt we were shocked. A musician was well outside our experience, and candidly, I think we all felt that a composer was not quite the person we ought to know. He belonged, in our unspoken theory, to the vagabond legion of artists, creatures of long hair, short purses and light morals. It was as though the spirit of licentiousness had abruptly invaded our decorous drawing-room. I don't quite remember how we passed the rest of the evening. I have a recollection of strain, arising, no doubt, out of our efforts to be calm and natural in a crisis, and out of our endeavors to prove to Hugh that his being a musician made no difference to our good manners.

But we were disturbed. We all felt that Bee must be rescued, that she must be made to realize exactly how she would appear in the eyes of The Hill.

"I say," I said lamely to her when Hugh had gone, "I'd never have thought that Bernard fellow was a song writer!"

The horror of Bee was that she took everything so calmly.

"Why should you?" she asked.

"I mean, he doesn't look it."

"Why should he look any trade in particular? People don't tumble to the fact you're an architect by the way you do your hair."

"I mean," said I stubbornly, "he's not a bit my idea of—of a musician."

"That's because you haven't any real idea of a musician," said Bee in a slightly tired voice. "As you haven't met a musician up to this, how can you know what they're like?"

"What Donald means," said Owen, who felt I was mak-

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ing a muck of things, "what we mean is that to look at he's—he's——"

"Quite a *decent* chap," mocked Bee.

"Quite an ordinary sort of chap," said Owen trying to make the blow non-hurtful.

"He is quite an ordinary chap," said Bee.

We stared at her. How these women failed to understand.

"He went to Edmundsbury," said Bee with a touch of deliberate malice. She grinned as we were struck dumb by the name of a Public School, the celebrity of which filled us with awe. Then, as we sat mute under the spell, she smashed her victory home. "He holds the school record for the quarter-mile. He was also the captain of the football team."

"Good Lord! who'd have thought it!" gasped Owen.

"You would have," grinned Bee, "if you hadn't heard he was a musician, you would have thought it quite easily. Because he is ordinary in all that sort of thing. Only he has a mind of his own, too. He's not stuffy like us. He doesn't accept corporate, ready-made thoughts and sleek rules like us. He's not stagnating—he's not a bolster."

IV

After that we struggled to adapt ourselves to the presence of Hugh Bernard. Our attitude was a complex one. There was our ordinate respect for a man who had been to a more exalted school than our own, who had done wonderful athletic things there. There was our condescension, tinged with distaste, for the unconstitutional musician in him.

As a result we treated Hugh rather like a performing animal. We trotted him out to play his songs or other

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people's symphonies with a sort of shamefaced pride, and while he played we explained him away to our friends.

"Queer sort of ass," we would say. "Went to Edmundsbury—never think it, would you? He was no end of a blood there, running and footer, and all that sort of thing. Queer that he should have a kink . . . music mad. He's one of the cleverest musicians the Guildhall has ever turned out. . . . But his people are quite nice. . . ."

Yes, we would strive to hide that licentious strain in him by harping on all those virtues we could understand and which were esteemed on The Hill. We had to do this. Bee refused to recognize the impossible. She and Hugh went their calm way, seeing more of each other, taking it for granted that they should go about together to the places they fancied, always behaving with a cool indifference to our feelings and the conventions of our select circle.

Hugh was certainly an alien figure in our house. Definitely he clashed with it and with its thick, regularized atmosphere of rigid decorum.

The house we lived in was a good house. It was the secret admiration of many families paying less income tax than my father. It was completely detached in a world where piano lessons on either side took on the flavor of common property. It had a big swing gate which might have admitted a carriage if any driver had been foolish enough to put it to the test. If he had, he would have found himself in difficulties on the little circular platter of gravel that stood between the gate and our front door, and which would have accommodated nothing more extravagant than a not too healthy barrow.

On the big gate that endeavored to convince the world that we were accustomed to carriages was an enamel plate, inscribed:

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NO HAWKERS

NO BOTTLEMEN

NO CIRCULARS

I fancy this had no more meaning than the big gate.

I remember when its significance first dawned on me, I spent a thoroughly perplexed period of my youth wondering how the postman could spare the time to stand outside that gate picking out the circulars from the genuine letters, or even the illegitimate circulars from the illicit variety. My father was addicted to those dealing with Dutch bulbs and missions for Christianizing Spain, and my mother was devoted to those connected with Jones and Higgins' infinite and unceasing bargain sales. How did a postman tell these from the vile and unwanted kind, or even from letters?

In the end I came to the conclusion that he had a particular magic of his own, probably manufactured specially to deal with his case by the suave gentlemen of the Egyptian Hall. Thus he was able to separate the wheat from the tares without troubling to examine his bundle.

Later I came to recognize that this enamel plate was a decoration only. The most father-irritating circulars, such as those which betrayed a passion for the possession of artificial teeth in any quantity (as if one mouth could have artificial teeth in any quantity) ran the blockade with regularity and impunity. And I never saw a Hawker blench and slink away at the sight of the baleful tapu. What a Bottleman was, or is, I have never discovered.

The plate, then, was there because it was "the thing" to have such a plate on one's gate. Everybody had one, and it meant nothing real. In its way it, and that fallacious carriage gate, typify our house and our life. We were constantly impressing ourselves with things that

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were of no actual value, save that they gave us a sort of foundationless importance.

People who came to our house insisted, not merely declared, but insisted, that it was pretty and distinctive. I wondered how they missed the smell of roast mutton.

Possibly the roast mutton was merely a spiritual stench, for we had a swing door, once glass-paneled in its upper half, but now covered in green baize as all the correct doors were covered in baize, which cut off the kitchen and was supposed to be proof against the most determined culinary odor excepting only cooked Brussels sprouts. Possibly, too, the noses of our visitors had been so refined by a life spent on The Hill, that in other people's houses they were incapable of realizing roast mutton smells. Anyhow, nobody mentioned them. They merely said, as Barbara Major said of it,

"What a ducky house. I call it awf'ly swee'. Really."

Really, perhaps it was. But roast mutton formed my own chief impression. The warm, fatty smell used to bowl me over with its subtle attack whenever I opened the front door with my latchkey.

I remember after I had passed my first examination in architecture, I had rushed at the house with a fine feeling of power and brightness. The flowers about the platter of gravel seemed jewel-like in the sun; and all the world was jolly. Then the impact of that secret, intimate stench deprived me of all happiness. I became somber and limp at once, and entirely disinclined to talk about my success which a few minutes before had seemed to me to be so glorious and communicable.

I am convinced that this is a matter of the profoundest moral significance, that because of these stultifying odors mankind is at the mercy of its houses. Agnes tells me that the smell of unpicked and unfinished frocks makes her tongue-tied to this day. That was her home smell.

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She used to return from a day of work that had been entrancingly full of enthusiasms and vivacities, and, upon entering the aroma of her home, found not one facet, one item of conversation to add to the common talk, though her parents at the dinner table were professedly eager to hear all the news.

If her mother had only made a point of thoroughly unpicking any dress she started to disembowel, or had entirely finished any dress for which she had bought new material, she would have discovered the sharp, fresh, stimulating character of her daughter.

But Mrs. Gillow was too busy hunting new bargains to find time to complete the old. When Agnes matched her mind-stultifying smell with mine, capped my roast mutton with the queer taint of new, and the fusty odor of old clothes that littered the rooms of her home, I thought I saw at once how it was that her father had one day vanished, supported, and, no doubt, impelled onward by the daughter of an auctioneer, who had the wisdom to buy her clothes as she bought most of her physical charms, ready made.

Bee had her own opinion on this essential home aura.

"We're roast mutton mentalities," she said scornfully. "The whole house and district has a roast mutton air."

"You smell it, too?"

"Smell it! I feel it."

"I only smell it——" I began.

"That's because, though you are instinctively roast mutton, you have moments of enlightenment. That's the artist in you—the little sharp spur that has made you into an architect instead of into a bank clerk that would revel in the splendid roast muttonry of it all. They—everybody on The Hill—don't smell the roast mutton, because it's part of them, part of the sleek, well-cooked, comfortable, trouble-about-nothing-disturbing life. But

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you—the artist in you plays tricks with your accept-all-and-question-nothing nature. It pierces through at times, and you are aware of the horrible congealed sleekness of things as they are.”

“This is your day for being clever, isn’t it? ’Fraid I don’t understand your speech to the House.”

“If you did, you’d choke,” she said. “The atmosphere of this life would choke you.”

I made to speak.

“Oh, shut up, Donald,” she said. “You make me tired. It would choke you—that is, you’d feel it, physically, almost, choking you—as I do. As it is, you are being choked, only you don’t feel it or know it.”

“Directly I begin to gasp—badly, I’ll rush to you for help,” I jeered.

“You never begin to gasp,” she said. “You never notice you’re being choked to death. . . . Look at father, look at mother. Did *they* ever know?”

V

Bee had drawn my attention to my parents, and the new view of them was something of a shock. I had accepted them as I accepted the whole of The Hill and the world. They were there, they were “the thing,” they were part of the circumstances one didn’t trouble to question. And yet they were part of the atmosphere, perhaps the nucleus round which the atmosphere collected.

My father was a tall, full-blown man. He should have been muscular, but was, instead, plump with a curious soft roundness. His one-time good features had blurred into an impressionistic first suggestion of handsomeness which did not live under scrutiny. He dressed with an implacable neatness and always in the same kind of

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clothes. His coat was as near a morning coat as anything could be that wasn't quite. His cashmere trousers had the finest possible gray stripe. I always wanted to tell him to brace them up at least two inches higher, but never dared. There was so decided an anarchy between the knee and the instep that I felt forced to explain to boys at school that my father was individual, eccentric yet august-minded. He scorned the ordinary. I did not mention trousers, but I hoped my hearers would understand. Years later I saw a photograph of Mr. Herbert Asquith and his trousers, and I wished at once that it had been published in my school days: it would have lent powerful support to my description of my father.

My father undoubtedly found our society extraordinarily trying. His phase of evading things had reached the stage when he evaded people. Just as he slipped away from the spur of ideas, so he shrank from the clash of human contacts, and from us more than any, for our youth represented many sharp edges and angles that were bruising to comfort. In the evenings, on his return from The City, he sat alone in the semigloom of the dining-room reading steadily through the non-detonative evening newspapers of his taste, drinking an unexciting whisky and soda, and smoking a sedentary-souled pipe.

Only on Sunday afternoon did he face us. When tribal ordinance demanded that the family should foregather in the drawing-room after the midday meal, he, too, drifted with repugnance into that chamber. He loathed the drawing-room, but the sinister custom was relentless.

As he came in he would put the brass fire screen in front of the fire and stand upright, facing us on the wolf-skin rug, wondering how soon he could get away from the abhorrent horde of his children. Sometimes he talked,

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but, like the rest of us, he had no conversation in his own home.

His way was to stand for a short time, while we sat about with incredibly blank minds straining to find things to say. There was no talk, but we managed to fill out time with a series of truncated interjections that served to span the void.

To my memory this weekly ordeal is represented by strings of unattached sentences which we flung at my father, and he dodged. They concerned the new electric tram service which was disemboweling South London and desecrating The Hill in such a way that our "select" neighborhood was bound to go down. We jerked out headlines connected with a novel form of amusement called the Bioscope, which, vaguely, we did not approve of because it was cheap and promised to be popular. We touched on that St. John of Prohibition, The Black List, a measure that was meant to stop drunkenness and merely created jokes. We considered the murder of the King and Queen of Servia (it was Servia then), Sunny Jim, Music Hall Wrestling, "Little Mary,"—in her day the sure and one foundation for most of our wit; the new Coliseum, the Russo-Jap war, the Walking Craze, the Fiscal Question, Santos Dumont and his impossible and almost irreligious dream of flying, Woman's Suffrage—but no, not Woman's Suffrage, the Shrieking Sisterhood, Strikes, Straphanging, Ulster. These and a score of private items, changing very little through the years, were our topics, and all were guaranteed to skate round any threat of argument and not to strike at the deeps of life.

These things we mentioned in snipped sentences, expecting no answer. All of us manufactured quantities of this sterile stuff for use during these dread drawing-room periods, with the exception, naturally, of Bee. Bee went

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her own way. She took the sofa full length, and dived imperturbably into the *Sunday Times*. And when she had read through the *Sunday Times* she went to sleep.

My father's attitude to all we said was antagonistic. His one definite principle was to disagree. Offer him any opinion from politics to brace-buttons, and he immediately said,

"Well, no, you can't say that. You can't possibly say that. . . ."

He had an air knowledgeable, *ex cathedra*. Indeed, within him, somewhere deep down under the accretions of inertia, there was an intelligence of acuteness. Once when Hugh had been to dinner, and had made some lofty, general statement concerning the unmusicalness of the Anglo-Saxon, my father charged down on him with an inevitable, "Rubbish! Rubbish! You can't possibly say that." Then, instead of drying up under the fire of his own retort, as he usually did, he broke out into a score of darting and acid sentences, giving us an astonishing, if disjuncted, vision of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries "when English song stood upright and independent, young man," when English melody had not been made knotty by Wagner-maniacs or degenerate by copiers of the negroes, when Tarrant and Farrant and Byrd and Bevin did not bow down the knee to Germany or the Viennese waltz merchants, no, not even to Italy; when Shakespeare's Dowland wrote the part songs of the English; when Morely, Ward, Wilbye and Weelkes put into the madrigal something that the Gallo-Belgian masters and the Italians could not surpass; when John Dunstable lived. . . . "If he had been a German or an Italian, he'd be known all over the world as the inventor of counterpoint. . . . And I suppose you've heard of Orlando Gibbons, eh? And Henry Purcell? They've even heard of 'em on the Continent. They allow

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us them. Have to. What they took from them to make foreign music can't be hidden under foreign names. But you don't know much about Pelham Humphreys? No. All the same Humphreys gave the twist to music that modernized it. You'll find him lurking in scores of anthems with smugger, more notorious names on top of them. . . . But no doubt you're above anthems and madrigals, and so on. . . . Nothing less than a nocturne satisfies you. . . ."

And,

"Purcell, now, if Handel hadn't got between Purcell and the sun we'd be able to see how much of that Englishman had got into the Saxon fingers. . . ."

We sat thrilled under the glinting shower of names, unknown to us, yet, we felt, splendid. But more than that it was my father's unexpectedness, his unguessed power and knowledge that left us breathless. This rain of golden sparks from a dull, or at best, an expired firework dazzled us, yet gave us a feeling that we were listening to a stranger.

Hugh gasped:

"But, sir, why did you let me be an ass? Why did you allow me to talk piff, when all the time you could knock the stuffing out of me?"

"Rubbish! Rubbish!" said my father, immediately sinking back into his habitual coma.

"But, sir," cried Hugh, "you know all this about music, and let me——"

"Why shouldn't I know?" growled my father. He glared at Hugh, became more self-conscious, which also meant slightly irritable, stepped off the wolfskin rug and left the room.

There was no reason why my father should show knowledge, but he rarely did. It meant an effort, a strain. I think on this occasion his antagonism to Hugh as the

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young limb who wanted to marry his daughter—*his* daughter, and a libidinous musician to boot, stirred him to attack. . . . He would show the young cub.

As a rule, he never "showed" any one. The decision, the combativeness of his first retort, tailed off. His disagreement, which, at times, had the fearful stimulus of a life-and-death encounter, wilted. His answers grew shorter, more vacant, weary. Discussion bled to death and died in the last stages of conversational anemia. He never fought out a battle. And he never really capitulated. The first, hammerlike rejoinder never led to anything.

My father had spent his life evading things. He evaded all verbal clashings. He evaded domestic worries. He evaded anything that would disturb him and strike his soul awake. So naturally he evaded us, and passed on the contagion so that we, too, evaded things, and him more than anything else. We were never at ease in his society, just as he was never at ease in ours. We seized excuses for not sitting together, or walking together, or exchanging ideas—and this attitude sprang first from him.

"Which way are you going? I'm going the other. That's the Guv'nor," declared Bee.

Yet he was, however I examine him, a technically good father.

As a young married man, when his circumstances were far from easy, he had worked extremely hard to give us all we, or rather my mother, required for our childhood. He had made notable sacrifices to meet what were the advanced—"new-fangled" was the word then—ideas to which my mother subscribed. He had met the financial demand of a better schooling than he had known himself. He had clothed us and fitted us out with a generosity which was profound when I realize how limited were his

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means in those days. He seemed, for example, to understand the brazen snobbishness of schoolboys, and saw to it that we did not suffer from them in the matter of pocket money and athletic equipment.

When we left school he did not relax, though I know he wanted to relax, and always dreamed of going into the country and living an easier life "when the children left school." Instead he worked and planned solidly for us, and gave us at least the benefit of good beginnings to careers.

He found excellent positions for Owen on every occasion that my brother's obsession for sport lost him one, until he steered him safely into his final insurance office. He did not murmur when my own ambitions in architecture forced him to foot a long and heavy bill for articles, study and support. At the suggestion of my mother, he sent Beatrice to the Guildhall School of Music.

As a parent goes, his achievements had been thorough and efficient. There had been, on the whole, very little of that clashing between the aspirations of the rising generation and the ideas of the old, which in many families seems to be an absolute convention. He was a wise parent. And yet he was no more than that . . . not a friend . . . not an inspiration.

He had been choked to death, and didn't know it, as Bee said. He had sunk deep into an awful accumulation of inert habits, and hated change and disturbance. In the close, overheated spiritual atmosphere of our house and suburb we loathed intellectual drafts. It was fear of these that made us uneasy with each other. We hated any brusqueries that might jolt us out of our grooves. And my father was deeper in this atmosphere than we were, though we, with the exception of Beatrice, were becoming more and more like him.

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VI

My mother was a woman with a sort of secret personality.

She had a great deal of character, but as she had grown into the low-ceiling atmosphere it had become passive and negative.

"She's a 'don'ter'," was Bee's opinion, "a soft and terrible darling, who smothers you gently, gently, gently with silky, suffocating layers of purring demur."

"There are moments when you want translating, Bee," said Owen. "What did all that mean?"

"Jack Poole is quite a good boy, don't think I am saying anything against him, Owen. Really a good boy, so kind to his parents; but do you think he is quite—quite the best kind of chum, Owen, serving in a shop?" . . . Bee's mimicry was quite deadly. Owen went red and wriggly. I guffawed. Bee said,

"I like Barbara. Yes, I do, my dear. She's *so* pretty . . . *so* . . . so fresh and innocent. . . . But I wish she wouldn't show off the curve of her throat whenever a man comes into the room. . . . I do wish she wouldn't. . . . It spoils her. . . ." It was my turn to get red. My feelings for Barbara had reeled under *that* thrust for months. It had apparently been so unconsidered, yet so deadly and true.

"It's rather caddish," I said haughtily, "talking like that of your own mother."

"You ass, Donald," said Bee calmly. "I adore Mother."

"That didn't sound like adoration."

"It was more than that. It was awe. She's terribly efficient and destructive in her negative way. The Guv'nor is merely passive, but Mother—she has a sort of soft, smothering activity."

"Activity in what?"

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"Oh, in defense of the general stagnation. She fights for the preservation of this backwater existence. It's not enough for her to ignore anything fresh, quickening, disturbing; she fights it as something that threatens the general comfort and calm. And she fights in her own way."

"Fights!" Owen scoffed. Fighting to him was a matter of tearing activity in a twenty-five-foot ring.

"Stalling, don't you call it?" said Bee to him. "She wears one down. By terrible processes of evasion, by a solid and awful lack of interest she shatters the wills of all who oppose her. She simply crushes out opposition by her deliberate, suffocating opposition."

, "And the Mater," I said, "thinks she is an advanced woman, believes in independence and that she's right in the van of everything that's fresh and revolutionary."

"That's where she gets in her most deadly work," said Bee. "She makes one feel that one's rebellions are wrong, because she is a real rebel, and *knows*. But all this talk about Octavia Hill and Mrs. Besant and Miss Beale and Miss Buss, and the way they all staggered the world, and were considered wild women is just a sort of anæsthetic to drug us. What does she think of these suffragettes?"

"Oh, they're not 'nice,'" said Owen, giving the views of my mother. "No 'nice' woman would do the things they do."

"Well—they're *not* 'nice,' are they?" I said.

"I don't care whether they are or not," said Bee, "only—Mother wasn't 'nice' when she shocked our grandparents. . . . You can see how she's changed."

"She's just grown wiser," I said solemnly.

"Rather—worldly wise . . . comfort wise. She's firmly against being shocked alive at any cost, it's too upsetting, and so she protects herself and father."

That was true of my mother. I can see her now, plump

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and redoubtably serene, with something of the smooth comeliness of the young Queen Victoria. She was very dainty in her clothes and very precise in the handling of her house. She was no fool, but her once active mind had degenerated into a sort of brilliant reticence. She had been an advanced woman, but not an advancing one. She was calm and immobile, and she it was who seemed to step in and deliver a gentle and deadly *coup de grâce* when our awakened interests were staggering back from the passive resistance of my father.

That was the way of the killing of Owen's passion for boxing.

It was the morning a few days after Owen's third successful boxing match. It was in the dining room, a room where through meals of aching boredom we were slowly initiated into an habitual torpor. My recollections of that room are ghastly. Round that dining table conversations were crushed to death under cushions of inertia. Topics and interests, however energetically initiated, were drearily done to death in listless and gradually rarefying vaguenesses. We never really talked, there was never any chance of a sustained discussion. We just ate and offered crumbs of comment and sat brooding until another crumb disintegrated from the abiding gloom.

Those family dining rooms of suburbia—how they molded the young into thoroughly representative prewar specimens of comfortable, stagnant, idea-hating, argument-shunning humanity. How we cringed away from the bitterness and sharpness of any argument. How we winced if voices were raised, tones became combative and urgent, faces became animated and ardent. How uncomfortable we were, how we wished they "really wouldn't do it," how we hated straining our brains and spurring our wits. How we wanted to be left alone.

A letter was on Owen's plate that morning when he came

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to breakfast. As he read it I saw the excitement and happiness growing in his face. He looked at my father and I could see he was bursting to tell all he had read. But he knew the atmosphere. Even his candid nature had taken on a habit of wary approach.

"I say," he said, obviously trying to be ordinary, "I've just had a letter from Jabez Moulton."

My father continued to read the *Daily Telegraph*.

"It's rather a decent letter from Jabez Moulton," said Owen.

"Who is Mr. Jabez Moulton?" asked my mother. She did not want to know. She wanted to distract Owen from my father.

"He's the big boxing manager, you know. He's——"

"Oh," said my mother, "boxing."

She said it in a flat tone. Owen's boxing was not a happy subject. He had, after a variety of billets in The City—all of which he had lost because whole-day cricket matches, or long-distance journeys to football games had not fitted in with office hours—settled more or less solidly into his insurance office. It had seemed as though he had turned over a new leaf. But several months ago he had developed a new passion for boxing. He was really an excellent boxer, and had quite outclassed his ordinary club opponents. Then "for a lark" he had allowed himself to be matched for a bout, of which we, consciously, said little. It was practically a professional fight, although we did our best to camouflage the small purse under the word "prize." He had whacked his opponent handsomely, and then the matter had expanded. He had had another, and another fight, each more pronounced in their derogatory professionalism . . . and we were faced with a development that wasn't at all "the thing." For this reason my mother said "Boxing" in a most quenching way.

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"He really is about the biggest manager," said Owen, with unstoppered enthusiasm. "And he's awfully pleased with the way I licked Jem White in that—that match" (even he had not dared to say "fight") "at the Baths."

Owen paused. He waited for some one to give him the cue to continue. Nobody spoke. Pauses in that room were as intolerable as discussions. Owen blurted out:

"I say, the things he says about me are rather good."

In the following pause there was something that forced my father to speak. He said combatively, since he always began with an assault,

"A prize-fighter's good opinion! You've risen in the world, Owen." My father's irony was as bitter as it was obvious. He was ready, one would say, for a sledge-hammer argument.

"But he's a tip-topper. He's—he's made men. He's the biggest man in his line. His word goes, you know."

"Ah, it goes," my father's voice and irony were already sounding the waning note. "Then you've nothing more to live for, Owen. . . . The good opinion of the Bruiser King . . . most valuable. . . . Perhaps I'm not an expert in these matters . . . but . . ." He tailed off, his eyes wandering to his newspaper.

"You won't be late again for the office to-day, dear," said my mother to Owen. "It's a pity to upset such a pleasant man as Mr. Wrinnen. . . ."

Owen did not succumb. He shook off my mother's first silken swaddling cloth.

"Really his word is a sort of law," insisted Owen. "He says I have great promise. That I should go far."

"In insurance or as a bruiser?" asked my father with a vague loftiness. It was a tepid effort of scorn. His mind was really centered on the *Daily Telegraph*, whose yashmaklike sheets he fingered.

"Well, I don't see. . . . There's big money in it. He

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says that, properly handled, I might reach—reach the highest honors.”

“Honors!” said my father. “*Honors!*”

“Knight Companion of the Thick-ear,” whispered Bee, maliciously. Owen scowled ferociously at Bee.

“He means championships,” my brother lamely offered to the mystery of my father lurking behind the newspaper. “Big money in them . . . thousands . . . I don’t see . . .”

“Oh, if you don’t see . . .” said my father in his bell-book-and-candle manner. And he said no more. He would say no more because he was incapable of driving anything home—that would have forced him to think and strain. It was Beatrice who spoke next. I don’t suppose she had any particular sympathy with Owen sitting in a hot, bitter, and frustrated silence, but she really was interested in the reason and logic and justice of the thing.

“What should Owen see, Dad?” she demanded. “I don’t quite see whatever it is myself. What is there against Owen’s being a boxer? It’s honest, and it is a way of earning an income—quite a good income. . . .”

I confess I wanted to learn whether my father would rise to this occasion. Would he face the thing instead of running away? I was on his side; I was feeling uneasy and inclined to loathe Owen for bringing up so disturbing a matter—but I wanted to see how my father met the crisis, too. He pried his mind loose from the *Daily Telegraph* and stared at my sister with a blurred sneer on his inattentive face.

“Now, Beatrice,” said my mother gently, “get on with your bacon and don’t worry your father.”

That failed, too. Bee faced my father.

“I suppose there is a reason . . . not some old prejudice?” she said.

“If you have no sense of values, no thought of what is

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proper, well . . . For a boy of education . . . a gentleman . . . been to a Public School . . . and in spite of all that to become a bruiser. . . . A calling of the lowest of the low . . . pub-loungers. Well, if you have no sense of what is right and proper, I have nothing to say. . . ."

He went back to his paper. There was a pause of appalling blankness. My mother said:

"Is that new marmalade nice, Donald? . . . Give Bee some. I'm sure she is ready for it."

"What I want to say," began Bee. My mother was placidly reading a letter out loud.

"From Mary Hickson. . . . Well, well. . . . From Hayward's Heath. Bee, the Hicksons have gone to live at Hayward's Heath. . . ."

"I was going to say to father——" said Bee.

"Curious that they should have gone to such a place. . . . They keep chickens. Mary writes to me to say that they would not come back to The Hill for the world. The people there are so nice . . . a refined atmosphere. . . ."

"Same damned old low-ceiling atmosphere," said Bee quite calmly. "The Hill or Hayward's Heath, what does it matter—so nice and so stagnant."

"Beatrice!" cried my mother. She was quite calm, too; she had conquered. That was her manner. Like a squire, or like a matador she stepped in and serenely delivered the killing stroke that ended all alarming conversations or adventures.

VII

My mother always conquered; she, more than my father, was the embodiment of our atmosphere, the vestal matron who kept the sacred flame of leave-well-alone alight.

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The effect upon Owen was the expected effect. He was beaten down by the cushions of convention. He knew that boxing was the thing he did supremely well. He knew he could do better there than at his insurance. He wasn't really swayed by the thought of the "lowest of the low" because he felt that he had it in him to keep himself above the bad element. . . . All the same he gave up boxing.

He temporized with Jabez Moulton, and from that moment he was vanquished, and he came to do the things that were "the thing."

He dropped his athletics and his boxing altogether, remained at his insurance office at a salary that would rise by yearly increments to something about £400. That was all he could hope for—but it was so gentlemanly, so respectable, so nice. The thousands he might have made at "bruising" would be tainted with vulgarity, and The Hill would have glanced askance at him.

He was beaten, and his moroseness and his unhappiness grew as his general exterior decorum improved. He gave up being companionable. He went for long, lonely walks. He shunned us all, he hated the house. A most melancholy figure—but so respectable.

"Poor old Owen," said Bee once as he slammed out of the house with a dark and brooding face. "The damned house has got him. He's been caught and smothered. He's had to give up the things he does best to do the things that look best."

"What!" I cried, "you don't mean to say you think Owen should have gone in for—fighting?"

"Well—look at him," said my sister, as if that were the answer. "Look at us all. We're afraid to kick over the traces, afraid of everything, most afraid of being natural. We're always scared what people will think about it—what they will say."

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"You can be natural and quite decent."

"Yes, but not our way. We're slugs. Look at the life we lead, eating and ruminating and drifting like cattle. We are ready to follow the easy, well-beaten paths of ordinariness because we daren't branch out and risk being classed as 'queer people,' 'common people.' We're scared of finding ourselves outside the common herd. That's why we run away from ideas, because they'll shock people. We're eternally wary of our good appearance, and we don't venture because of that. This damned, low ceilinged life of ours won't let us grow."

She was on the drawing-room settee. With a grunt of anger she kicked a cushion off it.

"Be ordinary, be everyday. Don't startle your neighbor by doing the things he does not do, or by expressing the ideas he does not express. Don't disturb people. Do the easy, comfortable, safe thing always . . . and end in a villa with a monthly 'Day' like mother and the odor of solvency and moral bankruptcy about you."

"All this because Owen has the hump to-day?"

"Owen has been beaten by The Hill. Mother beat him on the day he wanted to talk boxing, and she talked chickens—the Hickson's chickens and, yes, the new marmalade. What appalling weapons, and how appallingly strong!"

"What has marmalade to do with it, Bee?" I gasped. "Sometimes I think you're quite barmy."

"I used to think that Mother had no more than a gift for divine irrelevance," Bee said by way of answer, "but now I see it's a science with her—a science made instinctive and ruthless from long habit. She's absolutely invincible. That innocent interjection of hers—marmalade—chickens, and, pouf, the soft, squashy cushion of negation is over your head and you are suffocated. . . . Owen was suffocated."

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"Feeling rather stuffy to-day, old girl, aren't you?" I said to get her away from a discussion that made me uncomfortable.

Beatrice pounced on me with abrupt and feminine obliquity which I thought characteristic of her sex and utterly unfair.

"How is *your* ideal working out? Agnes asked me yesterday how you were getting along with your cottages."

A poisoned barb this. I wasn't getting along. Progress in my profession had not been as august as I had imagined it would be. A callow—as I now thought—enthusiasm for cottages had been overlain by other, bigger—I was certain—interests. To call my mind back to them was, I thought, quite disagreeable and Bee-like. I answered stiffly,

"I'm afraid I've been rather too busy to think about cottages for some time now."

"Too busy?"

"On larger things." My voice had a note of defensive condescension. "There was, for example, that hotel at Leicester; most of the design for that was mine, though the office built it up a bit. The hotel at Bexhill that followed——"

"Oh, your 'pubs'," said Beatrice with cold contempt

"Even pubs need designing, and they make a deuce of a lot of work. Somebody's got to do pubs and they bring in good money." I answered her in a growing rage. I hated Beatrice. I hated the way she poked and prodded one. She ought to know that these matters were best left alone. "What the devil is wrong with pubs as you call 'em," I demanded.

"Nothing at all, if they satisfy you."

"Because they're not arty, like Hugh's music stuff, I suppose you think they're beneath you. We can't all be superior people who——"

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"All right, old son, don't lose your hair," said Beatrice. She gave me a queer look which I resented intensely, and went calmly out of the room. But as she went she fired a parting shot, which was, really, the most telling point of the whole uneasy talk. She said,

"You're going under, too. . . . You're getting like your dear old dad."

CHAPTER II

I

THERE was a reason why the mention of cottages rankled. This reason was bound up with Barbara Major and Agnes Gillow.

I had met both of them a good while before. Theirs were the two new faces that emerged from the curious social salad filling our drawing-room on one of my mother's "Days."

They were intolerable affairs, those "Days." They were meeting places of all that was most select and ignoble in the feminine society of The Hill. There was a spurious, dry excitement about the gatherings. Each was a soul-storm of many high voices speaking at once, unlimited superlatives, and Mrs. Major's unfaltering, clear stream of information about unknown people who possessed the unique distinction of being related to other unknown people by marriage. A strange, dark mind, Mrs. Major's, composed, it seemed, entirely of cuttings from family trees. These cuttings were not entirely connected with the astounding mazes of aristocratic marriages, but more often with just ordinary but really "nice" people who lived within gossip radius of The Hill.

I thought her a frightful bore, but she did not appear to bore the other ladies of The Hill. Indeed the daring ease with which she handled the affinities of royalty seemed to give her an almost imperial status among us. When she talked no other she-dog barked. Even Mrs. Gillow played second fiddle, though her genius for dealing with

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all matters concerning bargain sales and dress materials was both electrifying and sacramental. Mrs. Gillow was, of course, at a disadvantage. However virtuous the wife of a runaway husband may be, something of his wrongdoing clings to her. There is a faint barrier between her and other women. It was as though she might infect other wives with germs that might cause other husbands to sicken for elopement.

Mrs. Major had brought Barbara, and Mrs. Gillow had brought Agnes to this "Day." For some reason I was there, too. Probably I had already found out that my special position gave me a pull over other clerks who merely worked for a living, and I could absent myself from my office. One learns these things early in one's "articles." Anyhow, I was present, and since neither Bee nor Owen were, the bulk of the fussy work of supplying tea and idiot little cakes to gossip-bemused matrons fell to me.

This was an intolerable plague. It prevented my getting into real touch with Barbara, and I wanted to do that enormously from the first moment I saw her.

She was adorable. She seemed to me fresh, dewy, colt-like, bewitching. She sat aloof like a young Psyche, on a chair we called a "daughter chair," a frail, hard, arty chair loathed by mature people for the spiteful brass-headed nails of its seat, and forbidden to the cataclysmic sittings-down of "great boys." She was consciously aloof, for there were no other "boys" present, and she never attracted her own sex.

How slim, flexible, deliciously immature she seemed, and how her small rosebud head lifted, and the long, thin, warm sweep of her throat showed as she refused my biscuits. A delightful throat. She was quite conscious of it; but then so was I. I was always trying to get beside her; I was eager to impress myself upon her, to hear her talk, to look at her. And I was forever being frustrated.

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Always the insatiable appetite for meek tea and meeker bits of cake and sandwich called me to business. Always the swirl and toss of the intolerable and gushing chatter cut me off from her. Always there was Mrs. Major telling some one that she was, in a sort of way, related to the Peckham Rye Phlodds, since the sister of her brother-in-law's secretary was a typist to a cousin of Miriam Phlodd. . . . Always that sort of asinine small-talk barred my way to her, stopping my sidling movements towards her, forcing me back again—

Generally into Agnes Gillow's lap.

II

It must have been trying for Agnes to have to listen so continuously to my confused, dry-mouthed badinage fired at her hurriedly to cover up my confusion, for after a good deal of it she said,

"Look here, shall I do the talking?"

I looked at her for the first time. She, too, was upright, but in a strong-busted, firmly-fleshed, fluent way. I saw that she was poised with something of the air of one sitting in a private box at a farce, looking on and finding it full of recordable items. Behind the clear serenity of her face there seemed to be the faintest suggestion of amusement, as though bubbles of irony were breaking from control and were rising and bursting just below the surface of her lips. As I stared at her, she said,

"I have giggled as much as I want to this afternoon. You need not try to be funny any more. And I'm quite capable of real conversation."

"Oh," I blurted. This was disconcerting. I decided she was a curious, repellent, satiric creature. I didn't like her. She was, I decided, a deep-breathing Maeter-

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linckian, a Soul's Awakener. These were our names for types that occurred quite normally on The Hill. They read symbolic verse and were prone to rather fuzzy-looking reproductions of pictures by Watts. Usually they were known by the fact that their blouses were unhooked at the back.

But Agnes was not unhooked. She had a white, calm, simple blouse, and her white skirt hung delightfully. There was a sharpness and directness in her bearing which was not in keeping with the tangled cotton that stood for the minds of our Maeterlinckians. It was, in fact, her sharpness that made her uncongenial, it was a flying in the face of our settled habit of evading things.

All the same, I sat down beside her, my eyes and my mind turned towards the previous aloofness of Barbara. And we were silent. Her silence attracted my wandering attention, it was challenging. Her eyes, I found, were hazel, very bright and clear, with curiously radiant whites. They seemed to say, "Well? Well? Aren't you capable of sensible talk?"

"Weren't you going to give me some real conversation?" I asked, feeling I was scoring. And she answered at once,

"You're an architect, aren't you?"

It was, I thought, the tamest opening. Her oddness and energy were only a pretense. Her attitude had been a mere trick to attract my attention. To punish her I, too, would adopt the curt, superior attitude.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not," I said. "I'm not even a fraction of an architect. I'm rather more than the office boy, but definitely less than the quantities clerk. I'm merely in an architect's office."

"Articled?" she said.

"Yes, but that doesn't make me an architect."

"And won't if you aren't one," she said unexpectedly.

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"We're both satisfied, then. I am and I am not an architect; it depends on the way each of us looks at it."

"We mean the same thing," she said smiling. "You are an architect because you've set out to be one. People don't go into architecture as they go into a bank or a grocery business. They start by wanting something, by having something in them that drives them to architecture. They have a direction, like engineers and statesmen and artists and writers. They start out with a rudder."

"I suppose that's true," I vaguely agreed. The conversation, I felt, was becoming a little rarefied.

"People with direction are interesting."

"Oh—oh—quite," I murmured. Rather piffle this upper stratum talk. I was uncomfortable.

"They're not unraveled, like most of the world. I mean there's a definiteness about them."

"Oh—oh—rather." I wanted to run away, she was a Soul's Awakener—sticky.

She sat back and laughed softly and clearly.

"Go away and talk to some one else—some one who will giggle."

It was douching. I showed my shock.

"You don't want to talk—really. You're wriggling. You don't like being prodded, it makes you uncomfortable."

I sat up and stared at her. She had touched home at our invariable attitude. But more than that, there was a ring about that sentence. . . . "Did you get that from Beatrice, or did Bee get it from you?" I demanded.

"Get what?" she asked. Her face was very quick and animated. Her skin was clear and white, and I thought of gold as I noted its peculiar opaque vividness, but it was soft and fresh and young, as young as Barbara's in its healthy comeliness. She seemed to have an immense

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inner vitality. And she was extremely good-looking—though not like Barbara, who was pretty. “Get what?” she was demanding.

“All right,” I told her. “Bee got it from you. I didn’t know you were friends.”

“Great friends. There is a lot in Beatrice.”

“That rudder again?”

“Her music, you mean? Well, it does help her. But then she tackles things squarely in any case.”

I could agree with that. There were moments when Bee was the most rasping person in the world to live with. She simply would not let things alone. But for a moment perhaps the conjunction of Agnes with Bee gave my sister’s vice some of the qualities of candor. I felt I might rise to it——

“I won’t wriggle away any more. Yes—I am doing my best to be an architect.”

“What are you going to build? Churches, public buildings, town halls? . . .”

“As a matter of fact,” I said with the stubborn air of the self-conscious, “I’m afraid I’m not greatly interested in large buildings. Perhaps I haven’t the gift. I’m—I’m rather keen on small stuff—cottages. Especially cottages. I believe I could make a good thing of, say, village housing. . . . I have fads.”

That was a challenge. To have fads in our circle was a fatality. Agnes did not speak. She nodded. Obviously she wanted to hear more, fads or no fads. I went on:

“I’ve an idea I’d like to build cottages. It may not work out when I’m through with my training, but just now I’m fearfully interested. . . . I want to design places that would be attractive and compact and up-to-date. I mean . . . not merely pretty outside . . . but . . . jolly decent homes into the bargain. I want to put in high

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ceilings and good cupboards, plenty of windows, and labor-saving devices . . . lots of 'em."

"People would insist on living in them?"

"Yes, that's the idea. . . . They'd find they couldn't go on living in the old muddly English way. And there'd be other conditions, of course—recreations. Not just curate concerts and penny readings and the usual stuffy entertainments—but music halls."

I waited there; would she be shocked by the daring of "music halls"? She wasn't. I went on.

"Something after the style of the twice-nightly shows. . . . I'm frightfully vague about it all, though. . . . It would mean an awful lot of studying, and keying up generally in village life. . . . Better means of transport, linking up villages. . . . But my general idea is to get rid of a lot of the rivalry of the towns. . . . I mean, you know, the towns naturally pull people away from the country, because they are so awfully attractive. One will have to counteract all that. . . ."

"It sounds enormously worth while," said Agnes quietly, with that lack of violent enthusiasm which made the sentence impressive. I was quite thrilled by her grave interest, and yet I felt frightened, uncomfortable. I had never let myself go like this and I was self-conscious. Such letting oneself go was discountenanced in our circle, and then, as I had never before put into words the vague chaos that made my inner ideal, I was in difficulties. It was a strain to disentangle my thoughts, and, true to my environment, I was even then backing away, fretting under the mental effort. . . .

A girl with the wrong lower register but plenty of ambition was agreeing to sing a song telling how "I opened wide my lattice." In the usual scuffle growing out of this I was separated from Agnes, found myself, at last by Barbara's side.

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III

There was no need for Upper Level talk with Barbara. I knew that speaking to her would have the ease of our convention. She sat faintly and inexplicably aloof, and was bafflingly silent, yet she responded to the known maneuvers. I said at once,

"I've wanted to sit down here all the afternoon. . . . Oh, she's singing already. . . . Have you noticed how brave singing makes people? Quite tame people who wouldn't dare to ask a waitress in a tea shop for a clean cup, will dare hundreds with 'Thora.' "

"Don't be rotten," said Barbara. "How do you know I don't sing?"

"You don't sing like that if you do."

"How do you know? I may have the voice of a frog."

"Do you sing? Do you?" I demanded with enthusiasm.

"Well, then—I do."

"Well, I hope you won't—to-day," I said. "I've got to your side at last, and I don't want you to be dragged away."

She smiled faintly, at that, the laugh playing about her vivid and quick lips, and then sinking back to the corners of her mouth, which, for a while, held the delicate after-light of laughter. Adorable indeed she was—and difficult.

Very difficult. She was enormously alluring, and almost delphically reticent. Barbara was a prize for which men had to do all the striving. She never helped—in those days. She sat silent, not helping . . . she had no conversation.

I always, during all the time I knew her, felt as if I were besieging her. I was always attempting to get at her, to quicken her to response, and it so very rarely happened. And yet she did not drive me away, she seemed

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to allure by the enigma in her. However silent she was, however aloof, I could not break away from her. Always that cool, flowerlike mystery of her pulled me back.

I tried her on that day with all our topics, tennis, theaters, dances, even scandal, and there was no response. She was not hostile, she was merely untouched. And I wanted to touch her, wanted her to warm towards me . . . that is how the cottages came up again.

Beating round, a masculine moth about her cold flame, striving to find something that would link us together, I tried subject after subject, and came to The City through sheer exhaustion of topics.

"Your brother's in The City," I said. "I'm in Chancery Lane. Is he near there?"

"No . . . near London Bridge," she said emotionlessly.

"Oh," I said, feeling hopeless. And then it suddenly came to me that what had animated conversation with Agnes might prove useful with Barbara. So I said: "Well, architects' offices are a little more west as a rule."

"Are you an architect?" She pricked up, glanced at me with that faintly reserved yet interested gaze of hers. I didn't quibble this time.

"Yes. I'm with a biggish firm in Chancery Lane. In time, of course, I hope to be on my own." Architecture was assuredly the touchstone. She was already more animated.

"An architect," she breathed. "How frightfully nice for you."

"Oh, well, rather fun."

"But frightfully nice. Better than being a business man. It's professional, isn't it? . . . like being a doctor or a lawyer and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes, just like that," I said, secretly charmed that fate had had the good sense to give me a vocation. I

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could appreciate the thrill of ecstasy that ran through her words. To be a professional man,—not a business man, but a professional man,—that was to be among the elect on The Hill. “Yes, it’s just like that, we have to swot and pass exams, and we don’t advertise. . . .”

“And it’s not trading,” said Barbara. And from her voice I knew that trading was low. “It’s so—so *different* from ordinary business life.”

“I suppose that’s because we have some aim, some direction. . . .” As I said that I realized I had followed up the conversation with Agnes too closely. Barbara’s blankness was quite frank. She withdrew, I could see her wriggling, slipping backwards. That sort of thing meant nothing to her. To save myself, I said quickly:

“I mean . . . it’s because our minds are a little different. We’ve got them fixed on something definite, like writers and artists and engineers and musicians.”

“Oh, no, not like an artist or a writer or a musician. . . . And not the same as an engineer—the oily kind,” she said with a slightly affronted air, as though I had sinned against holy common sense. “Artists and writers and musicians are rather—rather——”

What they were she was too “nice” to say, but her meaning was obviously derogatory. And I understood. I had utilized Agnes too freely. I had forgotten how we looked at artists and writers and the rest of those vessels of impecuniosity and indefinite living from whom a low standard of morals could be confidently expected. I hurried to explain.

“I mean . . . we design things in the same way, rather than manufacture things.”

“I don’t think it is in the least the same,” said Barbara with a faint resentment. “You can’t possibly call an artist a professional man in—in the way a lawyer is, can you?”

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I knew exactly what she meant. I saw the dignity and solvency as well as the solid integrity of that lawyer, and I saw the vagabondage of the artist . . . hard up for his rent, and in badly baggy clothes. I had made a stupid comparison. I just threw the artist and the musician and the whole hog, dog and devil of the clan to the winds.

"The really attractive thing about my work," I cried, leading her away from artists, "is the way things grow up under one's hands. Things take life on paper."

"Thrilling!" she said. "Big buildings, cathedrals, government offices—palaces . . . all from nothing but a piece of paper and a pencil. . . . How utterly gorgeous!"

She was really alight. I blew on that flame of interest.

"Rather. And little, pretty cottages; little sharp, clean, dinky, little cottages—cottages that absolutely entice one to live in them. . . ." But that was wrong. At once I saw that was wrong. Cottages were so trivial, a confession of incompetence. Glorious as they had seemed, they lacked vitality now.

"Cottages are nice, of course," agreed Barbara, trying not to show that she thought them dull. "Rather small—though. . . . But I suppose, at first, you'd have to do cottages." She brightened. "You have to learn, go up step by step from the little to the big things."

I took her seriously. The incredible idea of graduating from, say, a perfect Tudor cottage, via villas to, perhaps, the Albert Hall, seemed to me, at the moment, not laughable but natural . . . she was so pretty. Cottages were not worthy; they were mean, undignified, unambitious.

"One has to grow," I agreed heartily. "One has to begin on small ideas, and then it depends upon what is in one how things develop."

She swept me away with one of her bewildering smiles.

"But you'll reach cathedrals. I'm frightfully certain

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of it. Cathedrals—post-office buildings—palaces—BIG things.”

So, at once, we were intimate. That was the moment when my enthusiasm for cottages began to die.

IV

But the enthusiasm for cottages died hard. Not only was it difficult to escape from an ideal, but in talking about my ideals to Agnes I had, as it were, put a rod in pickle for my own back.

With Barbara—and I was with Barbara as much as possible after this—I could see those cottages in the true perspective of The Hill. They were unambitious, inauspicious. But when I was with Agnes, which was rarely, I felt disturbed about them . . . I felt I had betrayed something. What was it, the cottages or myself?

I remember one warm and radiant afternoon meeting her under the suave trees of The Hill. I was strolling casually, my tennis racket swinging in my hand, my thoughts leaping forward to Barbara, for it was to her house I was going. Meeting Agnes was rather a shock, but also I was struck by the springy and candid air of her comeliness. I felt I must stop and talk to her.

“Hallo,” I cried, “where are you hurrying to on an idle afternoon?”

“To catch a tram,” she smiled.

“Sorry if I butted into a secret,” I said, smiling.

“As a matter of fact, I’m going to see some pictures.” I knew why she had not said that right out. She understood The Hill attitude. To go specially to town to see pictures—“pictures” then did not mean Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks—might be construed as “pose” by The Hill. The only exception to that, of course, the Royal Academy Spring Exhibition,

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which wasn't so much "seeing pictures" as attending a religious rite. And the Royal Academy show wasn't on. I said as much.

"I'm going to the National Gallery," she said.

"What, all those funny old things. I went once as a kid, and got a headache . . . 'fraid I found 'em dull."

Agnes smiled, and I thought she was about to say something condemnatory. She hesitated, said instead:

"How are the cottages?"

"Oh," I answered lamely. "Oh, the cottages. . . . Well, I don't know whether they will work out."

"They will if you want them hard enough," she answered. I thought it quite unpleasant of her to persist in an affair that was purely my own.

"Oh, I don't want to limit myself," I said, trying to put her in her place. "There are bigger things than cottages. . . ."

"Churches and public offices and palaces?" I looked at her sharply. Had she overheard any of my conversations with Barbara? No, she hadn't. The suggestion was quite her own.

"They're on a bigger scale naturally," I argued.

"There are also meaner things than cottages," she said, decisively.

"Such as?"

"Churches and public offices and palaces."

"Rather cryptic?"

"No, I mean it. If an ideal for cottages is killed by an ambition for cathedrals—well, the cathedral is a meaner thing."

"It's a bigger thing, though."

"No," she cried with a strange vehemence. "No, smaller—if your heart is not in it."

"But can't my heart be in it?" I was thinking of

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Barbara—this strange, direct girl didn't know about Barbara.

"Why shouldn't it be?" she flashed unexpectedly. "I hope it is. I hate human tragedies."

She nodded and went on. Well, no, I could not like Agnes Gillow. She was so gently ruthless—she left something behind after every talk. Something disturbing.

V

There were other things disturbing, too. There was Hugh. Hugh, a disturbing spirit in our house, was disturbing to The Hill. To the Majors, who might be called the essential genii of The Hill, he was something outlandish, something wrong, unsound, even dangerous.

The first impact of Hugh on the general consciousness of The Hill emphasized his queerness. One evening when Bee brought him home Mrs. Major and Barbara as well as Agnes Gillow and her mother happened to be enthroned in the drawing-room. Hugh came in and sat in a corner, showing a distinct anxiety to speak to no one. His tallness was rather lank in those days, but his good clothes, his pinkish, Public School good looks, and the fact that his hair was quite normal made him rather a danger in our circle. People spoke to him in the usual Hill way, and he would answer them with a naturalness that was, at times, rather like a blow in the face.

Poor, mentally tousled Mrs. Gillow was the victim. Bee had offered a sketchy introduction, which my mother had enlarged—mainly as a warning. I heard Mrs. Gillow twitter,

"Oh, indeed, a musician! How wonderful! It must be thrilling to—er—music."

And Hugh answered that, coolly,

"Do you mind . . . I'm not talking music to-day. Do

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you know they are using a new four-cylinder compound engine on the Great Northern? Perhaps you've seen it. It's a beauty. I've just been looking at the drawings of it in the *Locomotive Magazine*." He went on, quite gravely and naturally, to talk of the exquisite intricacies of railway engines, and the fascinations of such strange things as Walschaert and other gears.

Mrs. Gillow was immediately, and I don't blame her, conversationally winded. She had been ready to patronize the art of song, but to patronize a four-cylinder compound engine was beyond her presumption. She turned flutteringly to my mother, Beatrice and Mrs. Major, but they were all engaged at the moment, and she had to sit helpless, her fearful eyes on Hugh in much the attitude of a rabbit watching a hungry snake.

"No, he's not putting on side," I said to Barbara in answer to some sound rather than words expressive of scorn. "He really is keen on that sort of thing. He's at the Guildhall, where Bee goes, only he's a teacher, a real musician. And that engineering's real, too. He has a kink. He loves grubbing about in the innards of locomotives, and getting oily and enthusiastic. And he draws them awfully well. You'd never think he was a musician if you saw those scale drawings of his."

"I suppose—musicians are rather freaks."

"Hugh's not so bad. His songs are ripping. You'd like 'em. They are just your sort, very jolly and very quaint."

"It must be fearfully exciting to write songs. . . . What does he do . . . I mean what does he work at?"

"Work?" I asked, taken aback.

"Oh, I remember. You said he was a teacher. I suppose he doesn't do anything else?"

I saw what she meant, and I wasn't amazed. I hadn't any reason to be. She was simply expressing our attitude

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towards the arts. Writing music wasn't what we called work. It wasn't a regular job with a desk and an office and a salary and an air of superb solvency. It was a sort of hobby. I knew that Hugh's regular working day, at teaching and his own compositions, was a twelve against my seven-hour day at the architect's office, but, like Barbara, I couldn't actually believe it to be real work. I was too much at one with the attitude about me.

Barbara developed an interest of curiosity with regard to Hugh. There was nothing friendly in it. It arose merely from the feeling that, since he was a performing animal, he had better perform and justify himself. She said she would like to hear some of his songs. I called across to Hugh, asking him if he would sing or play some of them.

"Right-o," said Hugh without the usual coy protest of The Hill.

"What are you going to do, Hugh?" asked Bee, switching off from her talk with Agnes.

"I'm going to sing and play."

"No, don't," said Bee.

"Oh, can't I?" protested Hugh calmly. "I'd like to play one or two. I've a new one that is really good."

"If you get onto that music stool, you won't get off it for the rest of the evening," said Bee. "I want to talk to Agnes."

Hugh, who had risen quite readily, sat down as readily.

"I want to talk to Miss Gillow, too," he said. And without any sign of frustration he did it.

"Musicians are frightfully conceited, aren't they?" asked Barbara. And I had to take up the task of explaining away some one connected with ourselves.

I felt hot about Hugh. Why did he outrage the decencies? Why did he make himself different, conspicuous? Why didn't he understand that people didn't talk about

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anything connected with themselves as "really good"? I knew that the attitude with Hugh was quite impersonal. He would have described something of his as "quite bad," if he thought it was quite bad, but to say that it was good was not modest, was "not done." Why should he say or do the things that nobody else said or did? I felt angry; even as I tried to justify him, I knew that he was falling below the standard of Barbara and The Hill. He was "a bit of a blag," and it did me no good to be connected with "a bit of a blag."

The sensation increased during the evening, and I could feel the tinge of hostility towards Hugh growing throughout The Hill in the days that followed. Mrs. Major had been at work. We were being regarded with a good-humored contempt. People were looking down at us from their serene altitudes of correctness. I could hear them say, "What are those Harbour people doing to allow that freakish young Hugh Bernard to frequent their house?" or "I can't imagine what Mrs. Harbour can be thinking of to permit Bee to be seen about with that young fellow . . . a *musician* . . . and one thought the Harbours such nice people."

The thing got on my nerves. My uneasiness was profound. I felt that my sister was placing herself outside the pale. Barbara used to smile in a meaning way whenever Bee and Hugh were mentioned, and at every smile I writhed. Bee really shouldn't do that sort of thing.

VI

I didn't put my growing discomfort into words, not direct words; I was incapable of directness, but I spoke allusively, making Bee's absence from the house with her "music merchant" a sort of bitter joke, as though I didn't

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take it seriously; as though, unpleasant as it was, I knew that presently she would come to her senses.

That was our habitual attitude. We never attacked Bee herself except in this joking way. Candid attack was entirely foreign to us. We allowed my sister to see that we could be tolerant while she amused herself, because we knew that presently she would see things with our more solid wisdom. But that attitude was a difficult one. Bee would not play up to it. Sometimes she would hit out sharply and our moral knuckles suffered, as they did on the day when she refused to go out cycling with me.

"Oh, going out with your music master again," I said contemptuously.

"No, I'm going out with Hugh."

Her solidly calm air always entangled me—and Bee knew it. I blurted out,

"Good Lord, haven't you anything better to do?" and Bee, instead of ignoring any easy way of ending the matter, said with dismaying directness:

"If you think I should not go out with Hugh, just say so plainly."

"I don't think you ought to go out with Hugh," I said plainly.

"Reasons, please—if any."

"Well, if you don't see for yourself . . ." I began.

"*That* doesn't cut any ice. It means nothing. It's just a stock phrase to allow you to get out of an argument."

"Argument! One doesn't argue about those things."

"No, we don't, we evade 'em. But this time we will for a change. Go ahead—— What is there about the business of Hugh and me I can't see and you can?"

"Heaps of things."

Bee was silent, smiling, provocative. Why didn't she leave things alone. Then——

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"Well, heaps, you said. . . . With all that material, my lad, why boggle over just one fact? . . ."

"Well, in the first place, it's . . . it's not the thing."

"I bet you a bob you don't know what that means. 'Not the thing!' What *does* it signify?"

"You know quite well it's—it's something that 'isn't done.'"

Bee chuckled,

"What a chump you are, Donald! You talk like a parrot; you just repeat sentences without in the world knowing what they stand for. What is 'not the thing' that 'isn't done'? Falling in love with a man——? My dear ass, it's universal."

I was appalled.

Of all the things we glossed over, this thing called love was the most evaded. It simply *was not* mentioned—not even by lovers. I would never dream of saying the fateful word to Barbara. Though we cultivated each other's society, we never spoke of our feelings, indeed, we sheered, in something of a panic, from any mention of our emotions. This vague something that was between us we avoided naming in very much the same mannner as the ancient Israelites avoided uttering the name of God. That Bee had spoken coldly of her love for Hugh distressed me. I was fearful of answering her. I could only fall back on the sort of retort my father might make.

"What does a kid like you know about love?"

"I'm in love with Hugh," said Bee calmly. "Take it as a fact and get on with it."

"But you haven't the slightest idea what it means."

"I'm trying to find out if you have the slightest idea what you mean. Leave me out of it. What have you to say against it?"

"Well, then, he's a musician."

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"That's not a sensible remark. Why should the mere label make Hugh impossible?"

"Well—well, you know what musicians are."

"I don't. Do you? Or do you only know what people think musicians are?"

I tried to remember some definite and damning musician. Beatrice went on:

"You are full of second-hand prejudices. We've been brought up in that atmosphere. As a matter of fact, Hugh is exactly the same as you or Owen. Same sort of family, same sort of school and habits. If he didn't compose, he might have been a bank clerk. That's how I find Hugh. The music doesn't make any difference—except it makes him nicer."

"There are other things," I said darkly, letting her see that I was a man of the world and that she was a woman without any sort of mundane franchise.

"Morals?" she said.

I blushed. I looked at my toes.

"Don't you worry about that; Hugh's clean," said Bee coolly.

I gasped.

"I say, Bee——" I cried.

"I *know*; we've had that out," she was cataclysmically matter-of-fact.

"I say——"

"Why shouldn't we? We're going to marry and live together, and so on. Why make facts nasty by turning away from them? We've talked it over. Hugh hasn't had time to do the smutty little things that these Johnnies in town do, mostly because they are one of the boys, don't you know. He's got something better to do—work, a career."

I rushed off to firmer ground to escape from this sort of devastating conversation. . . . I was in absolute terror

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that my mother should come in. If she came in, Bee would not have checked for a moment her flow of appalling candor about sex, and I should have been sick with shame. That was us. However we talked about it in small groups, we posed as being entirely, even glacially, unconscious of it in our social life. So I plunged onto the firmest ground I knew.

"I meant something entirely different," I said coldly. "Money. What sort of income do you imagine your songwriter is going to make?"

"How much are you making now, Donald?" my sister asked.

"What's that to do with it?"

"I just want to see how Hugh compares with a young man typical of 'what's done' in marriage," she said sweetly. I gritted my teeth in anger.

"Well, you know very well it isn't a comparison at all. You know as well as I do that I don't expect to make much of an income until I begin properly—I've only just passed my first exam."

"So your income is still in the air?"

"Don't talk like an idiot. You know very well I have good prospects. The design for the Leicester hotel I did was taken by Hall Milne and that's a sign I'll make good."

"Oh, your pub."

"Pub or what you like to call it, it'll bring two hundred pounds of fees to the office. I shall get a percentage."

"Hugh made eight hundred pounds last year," said Beatrice calmly.

"What?" I cried, staggered by the sum. Hugh was only a few years older than I.

"He made five hundred seventy pounds the year before that, and he expects his income to go beyond a thousand pounds this year. His name is getting better known, and his royalties are accumulating."

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I stared at her, made dumb, first by the fact that a despised musician should make so much money—to us it was a great deal of money. And again, and even more, I was stricken by the fact that Bee and Hugh had so far forgotten the niceness of things as to discuss the money aspect of their affection. I glared at my sister, bereft of words. And Bee put on her hat cheerfully, remarking:

“Anything further to say? No? I thought there would be nothing.”

I waved my hands wildly, “All the same. . . .”

“You’re going back to the old gag. All you have against Hugh is that he is a musician. Well—you’ll get used to that.”

She went out. What she meant was that if we didn’t get used to it, we would have to put up with it. She had made up her mind and was going her own way.

We never did get used to it. The best I could do was to drop a hint to Barbara and the Majors about Hugh’s income. The solid worth of that income gave him a certain respectability which somehow differentiated him from those who bore the taint of artistry.

CHAPTER III

I

WHEN Mrs. Major introduced me to any one she always said:

"Let me. . . . *Do* you know Donald Harbour? *The* architect."

I wasn't *the* architect, of course, or really any very important sort of architect, and in the beginning I was embarrassed, and wished she would not do it. But beneath there was a certain smugness which purred under that touch. I did rather like the effect of being superior to the mere "commercial" people about me, and as I grew more complacent I substituted a deprecating yet ambiguous smile for the shy protests I had first employed. When responding to any architectural utterance my new acquaintance might give off under the spur of this introduction, I allowed a kindly tinge to come into that smile, and, in a friendly fashion, made the speaker see that his or her taste in buildings was questionable. That was the sort of air we adopted.

Mrs. Major cared nothing about architecture as an art. She merely used it as a decoration. It was as though she were saying "Donald Harbour, C.M.G." Her redoubtable lack of interest in my calling was only exceeded by Barbara's lack of interest.

Mrs. Major, sitting beneath a dhurrie, the acid-colored stripes of which stood out against the green of the great old mulberry tree in her garden, and protected her against that tree's stealthy and sanguinous droppings, would sometimes ask artificially,

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"Ah, now, and how is the architecture?" for all the world as though it were a teething child. She would then adopt an angle of attention, if, as in my early days, I was unwise enough to take her at her word, and tell her how architecture was.

But she did not listen. I don't think nature had provided her with the necessary organs for attending to general information. She had merely acquired a habit of simulated sympathy. She had learned that it was a polite trick, very much practiced by us, and the sort of "thing" that a really nice woman did.

Really the lean mind actuating that parched figure was busy chewing the cud of pedigree even as people talked to her. In the middle of, say, an absorbing description of a blazing touch of genius that had led me to put ogee windows into an inn billiard room, her eyes—they were brownish and cloudy, and always reminded me of cold mulligatawny soup—would yaw round to me, and, with a look of intense excitement on her face, she would slash right into my description, with:

"Now that dear Ena is marrying a Hapsburg—of course, one knows that by the lip—that would make her a cousin to . . ."

When she was not talking herself, or being talked to, she was, with an inner and antlike activity, building up fresh strata of family ramifications from the pages of the *Queen* or of *Modern Society*, a paper that had an indiscreet cover of a bold and livid red, which she stripped off that no one might guess she was reading a periodical so indelicate.

But vague though Mrs. Major's interest in my profession might be, Barbara's was astonishingly non-existent. This was a matter of endless bafflement to me. I believe that, on the whole, and on occasion, she really was as definitely fond of me as she could be definitely fond

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of anybody. She showed no repugnance, and repugnance was her nearest approach to a decisive emotion. When she said of a boy, "He's a pig. . . . Look at his greasy skin . . . fancy kissing . . . ugh!" I knew that that boy was entirely ruled out of her life. On the other hand she found me non-greasy. She even went out of her way to dwell upon the excellences of tallness and slimness, brown and "nicely" brushed hair, and a dark, slightly vehement look in a thinnish, strong-boned face that, she thought, *pince-nez* brought out rather than suppressed. I could not help gaining satisfaction from these inferences.

And she allowed herself to be paired off with me. She allowed me to hold her slim and thrilling hand in the duskier periods of musical comedy. She went with me, plus a sister who always seemed slightly splenetic at having to be there, to musical comedies. She allowed me to steal, rather paradefully—I wanted to extract the full flavor of romance from the episode—one of her soft, deliciously crumpled gloves which gave off the faintest odor of Californian poppy, and a handkerchief or two, which I stuffed down into my top, left-hand waistcoat pocket, near my heart, and forgot until months after I rescued them smelling vilely of the India rubber I also habitually carried there. She allowed me to buy her gloves and Fuller's sweets and picture postcards to assuage a desperate habit she was at one time a victim of. And more than these things, she did give moments of terribly sweet intimacy, intoxicating moments when she seemed to precipitate herself into reality out of our pale dream of adolescent love. . . . Once when I was sketching a castle in her sister's autograph album, she leaned over me, strongly pressed her breast against my shoulder, so that I could feel its softness like a fire, let the soft, crinkly tendrils of her puffed hair lie against my face—a moment so wild that I could scarcely draw. Again in the midst

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of a summer party, she bubbled over, snatched something from my hand, darted down the garden laughing at me with that defiant note which demands chase. And when we had got well among the bushes beneath the soft darkness of the trees, she surrendered abruptly, allowed me to snatch her into my arms, leaned her whole weight eagerly against me, threw back her head so that I must kiss her throat, and I kissed and kissed. . . . Then, tearing herself away, and laughing, she ran back into the light where the rest of the party was gathered. Now and then she gave me these moments of throbbing and lyrical emotion, dashing them at me suddenly out of her reticence. They were never referred to, but they were part of that unspoken recognition of the fact that she had singled me out.

Certainly I think she was fond of me in her way and yet neither my work, nor the ambitions that were wrapped up in my work, ambitions that could mean only one thing to her, excited in her the slightest concern. She was less than incurious, she was frankly bored by any talk dealing with architecture, my difficulties, my aspirations. All such conversations she found dull, and she did not hide her weariness.

II

Her attitude was, at times, dismaying, for it seemed to me that she of all people should be the one to take fire from the flame of my enthusiasm, that she should help and stimulate. But she soon cured my expectations in this respect. The beginning of that cure was in the early days, when I was only in the beginnings of my pubs and still in that state when ideas came to me in exquisite flashes, when I could yet kindle and blaze in the enthusiasm of doing the things I wanted to do, in something of

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(though not all) the manner in which I wanted to do them.

There had been an open competition for a Board of Guardians' building in a southern town. It was a small town, ripe and sleepy, and I knew it well. As I read the conditions of the competition the town itself rose up before me in all its red-bricked mellowness, and at once I had a picture of an opposite building standing definite and four-square in my brain.

It was an inspiration. The whole thing came to me with the unequivocal sureness of an inspiration, and I saw the structure, an English Renaissance building, with deep characteristic bays, mullioned windows, and pierced parapets, fitting into, melting into the very atmosphere of the town.

I worked out my preliminary sketch with the completeness and certainty that is part of such blazes of vision. My chief, Hall Milne, had been roughing out an idea of his own, but when I showed him my suggestion, he threw his drawing aside, and gave his undivided energy to helping me. He said little enough. He came from the Midlands where comment is mainly censure, on the idea that good work is merely what man ought to do and praise is supererogatory. And he helped very little, there was no need; the whole thing built itself up from within without a hitch. But when the plans were complete, and were being sent off, he said,

"That won't win, Harbour. The butcher, the brick-maker, the draper and the rest of 'em who sit on the Works Committee won't look at it. The thing that'll melt 'em is a Bethel-Ionic façade with neoclassic cupolas. Not a chance, my lad . . . but it's blasted good work, an' they might as well see it."

Well, they saw it—and accepted it.

Hall Milne was pleased under his screen of cynicism;

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he talked of there being at least one Town Council that could be betrayed into good taste. I was in a transport of delight. The work was good, there were no after-miseries about it, as I was already beginning to experience in my "hotel" designing. It was a building fitting into my ideal. And it was a definite advance in ambition. I had designed a public building. My foot was on the first rung of the ladder of fame, I was beginning to mount—soon I would reach palaces, yes, palaces.

The news of my success came in the afternoon. It was an afternoon made unendurable by happiness. I wanted Barbara to know of my victory at once. I was seeing her that evening. We were all going to a dance in a hall in Dulwich, and I could tell her then. But the time dragged woefully. As I got into evening dress I was buoyant, and perhaps romantic. I was thinking of the dramatic news I was to give to Barbara. I saved it up for her, had told no one. She and I would be the first to share it in a splendid explosion of elation. I pictured her listening to my story, that reticent and definitely incurious imperturbability changing gradually and sparkling under a growing delight at my news.

I was late in arriving at the dance, and a waltz was in progress when I went into the hall. Barbara was hard to find. I evaded Beatrice and Agnes, who had dance cards with blanks in them, and prowled rather morbidly round the room looking for Barbara. I saw her at last in the heart of the room. She was in the arms of a bladderish and redundant youth, Curling, the son and partner of a coal merchant in Peckham, a fellow that only a very large income made endurable. Barbara was looking into infinity with the half-smile at the corners of her mouth which told me she was listening to her partner, and that he was being witty. She passed me several times, and failed to see me. I was angry with her absorption

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in Curling's perpetual chatter. I drifted to the place where Mrs. Major sat, and as I did so the waltz ended abruptly, and I lost Barbara altogether.

I was acutely melancholy. I felt that she should have known instinctively that I had immense things to tell her. I felt that she should have stood about publicly so that I could find her, even if she did not think it proper to seek me out. She knew I was to be at the dance; we had talked about it, and the jolly time it would be for us. But without an attempt to find me she had vanished with Curling, and I was left disconsolate; not the least of my embarrassments being that Agnes and one or two other girls were near me, and I ought to book up dances with them.

The music started again, the floor filled with couples, and it was minutes before she appeared. She came out of a passage set with a dense forest of disillusioned and imperishable palms. Curling was still talking, and she was smiling. When I went up to her she said, bewilderingly,

"This isn't yours, is it, Donald?"

She hadn't even noticed I was late, apparently. Before I could express myself adequately, a youth with a possessive glare arrived and took her arm. I managed to blurt out something about her card, and just as she went off she unhitched it from her wrist, and with the same motion that swung her off into the waltz she handed it to me—even then she was listening to her companion.

Her card was a thing of anger for me. All the best dances were filled. The interval dance she had booked with Curling. There were one or two blanks; a quadrille in the half before the interval, a dance I loathed, and some numbers late in the evening were all she had left. I stared at this program tortured with self-pity and anger. My success of that day seemed to make the

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emotion more than intolerable. For a moment I poised in desire over those blank spaces, then misanthropy gripped me. I pushed my own program into my waistcoat pocket without adding her name, and, as she came by, I put her card into her hand. She threw me a half-smile between smiles at her partner. I went back to Mrs. Major, found a plain girl sitting beside her with that air of decisive unconcern which marks the wallflower and in bitter delight danced with her.

I booked up as many dances as I could with Beatrice and Agnes. With Agnes I booked the significant interval dance, a dance that had a subtle meaning not unconnected with the mating instinct. As I asked her if I could take it, she said with her curious, ironic smile:

"The penalty of being late." I knew what she meant and made a flustered rejoinder, and she said dryly, "I was late, too." And I had to make what I could of that.

She was quite ravishing; her vivid comeliness seemed to enfold me in its radiance. There was not a hint of the Soul's Awakener about her, for she was enjoying herself thoroughly and with an intense, juvenile zest. When we were dancing I forgot to cuddle my misery to me, I enjoyed myself hugely.

But I always remembered that I was miserable. I avoided Barbara pointedly. There was satisfaction in the thought that she would notice me by my absence. Only she did not seem to notice. Once we came together in a set of lancers, and she danced with me quite calmly, oblivious of my resolute silence, turning back to her own partner with an untrammelled smile after each stoic gyration. That goaded me. Towards the end of the dance I muttered to her tragically,

"I did have something rather important to tell you."

She smiled at me just as though I had said, "Jolly floor, isn't it?" put her hand up, straightened her hair.

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"Really?" she said, and turned and danced with her partner with the utmost unconcern. I gazed at her slim back in outraged horror. "So this is the way you receive an epoch-making event," was probably the trend of my inarticulate emotion. And I certainly washed my hands of her then and there—a spiritual action which increased the misery I was enjoying.

I plunged into that aloof abandon which, I fancied, met my case. And I planned a punishment. She would learn second-hand what her indifference had lost to her.

I sat down by Mrs. Major and told her the story of my magnificent success, exaggerating the whole thing gorgeously. That wretched Board of Guardians' building took on the qualities of a great, metropolitan town hall. I knew well how to get an effect on Mrs. Major's mind, and I left her with a vague impression that I had that day launched myself on a sort of chute that would carry me swiftly to the largest kind of income and a knighthood into the bargain.

And I flung my secret to the winds, telling everybody, everybody who could tell Barbara, so that she would get the impression that she alone in that room had not shared the momentous tidings. What a lyric gloom I was in! I knew a thrill of sheer joy when Curling, with Barbara on his arm, stopped near me after a dance, and the bloated fellow with a dull and superior irony cried at my saturnine bearing,

"Hallo, Harbour, why so cheerful? You look as if you had had a stroke of good luck to-day."

"As a matter of fact I have," I said with dignity.

"Well, you don't look it," he said, for he was incapable of keeping it up.

"No?" I said. "I feel it." And then I walked slowly away.

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I waited until the interval for Barbara to respond to that revelation, but she didn't. At the interval, as we collected into different groups, Mrs. Major, probably chewing over my exaggerations, called archly:

"Are you coming with us, Donald?" And as Barbara was by her side, looking towards me as she spoke, it gave me morbid delight to call back,

"Sorry . . . you see, I'm with a party already."

Then I went off and plunged Byronically into a really jolly gathering, of which Agnes was not the least vivid member. Agnes was quite delightful. We engaged ourselves in a cut-throat rally. Her soft skin, her alert and clear eyes, the ironic serenity of her individuality captivated me. Purposely I had put everything that was "the thing" behind me, I had finished with all that once and for all was my pose, and I entered into the outrageous nonsense of the little party of which Beatrice, Hugh and Owen were also members, with something of the feeling of a man plunging into drink. When Agnes said, in a pause we had to ourselves, "You're still human," I didn't resent it. I asked her cheerfully what on earth she meant by that.

"Oh, you're becoming rather a thorough man of——"

"The world?" I suggested.

"Of The Hill," she clinched.

"Lord preserve me from that," I cried fervently and without faith. "But I am rather human to-day. I've just pulled off a coup. A design of mine has just been accepted. . . . It was a competition."

"Oh, good. What was the design?"

"A public building—for a big southern town."

"Not a cottage?" she said dryly. I laughed.

"No, not a cottage, but something like it. It grew out of my cottages. Really, it's part of them, a sort of more spacious application of the cottage idea." I ex-

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plained how this was, how my design was really a thing of beauty and appropriateness, complete and perfect in itself. And as eagerly as I explained, so eagerly she listened. And I talked without restraint and with happiness. "It really is something I can care about, worth while. I'm quite bucked about it."

"I'm awfully bucked about it, Donald," she said, and in her face and her bearing I saw the complete and candid giving of herself in pleasure at my success, and in my heart I knew her at that moment to be a woman not merely lovely, but very fine in texture.

Barbara—she was completely wiped out of my mind for that brief hour. When she came into it again it was with a sensation that was quite disturbing. As we broke up from the interval, Beatrice and Agnes drifted out of the refreshment room with the Major party, and I heard Agnes say to Barbara in tones of genuine pleasure.

"Don't you think Donald's success is splendid?"

I was suddenly rather fearful because Agnes had spoken of that matter, and I saw the faint surprise, the faint stiffening of Barbara's attitude. Barbara was so exquisite. The blow that had been struck was, perhaps, too hard. And then a faint touch of morbid satisfaction came to me, and my mind said darkly, "Well, *that* will teach her."

I suppose it did, in a way. Halfway through the second half of the program we met again in a lancers set. She did not smile at me. And as we danced silently together she said,

"You haven't danced with me, Donald. When is our dance?"

It was the chance I had waited for, the darkly bitter, delicious moment. I had meant to say something cutting, but as that soft, slim figure moved with the gentleness of

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a flutter in my arms, I feared saying anything crucial. I mumbled,

"You were booked up . . . couldn't fit anything in . . . thought you would save something. . . ."

She did not answer, and returned to her partner without saying anything more. But at the end of the set, she cried,

"You're being a pig, Donald," and she went off, and my heart melted into self-satisfied misery. I forgot all about Agnes, and even when, in a little aside, in another dance, Barbara spoke of girls who "made up" to fellows, a shaft obviously directed at Agnes, I did not feel elation at her slight jealousy, I felt sore and miserable.

And when the dance was over, and we were all waiting for a tram to take us up to The Hill, she said in a tone almost too slight to be petulant, "You don't tell *me* about winning competitions," I did not clinch my victory, I simply lay down and groveled at her small, thin feet. I answered lamely that she seemed to have had other things to interest her, and on her saying, "You know I'm fearfully interested," I took her at her word, and told her with excitement the wonders of my success. . . . And I knew all the time she wasn't thrilled by it, she wasn't giving me the eager sympathy that Agnes had given me. She was merely listening because she was expected to listen, and because it was part of the tactics of "making it up." And though I knew these things I spoke to her with all my old intensity of rapture, glad only at telling her, laying it as an offering before her.

"I'm frightfully glad, Donald," she said tonelessly at her door. "You are getting on. You'll soon be frightfully rich."

Her gloved hand lingered for that dragging second in mine, and I went away in ecstasy.

I had completely forgotten Agnes.

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III

Barbara was not interested in my architecture, but then she was merely following the accepted tradition of our kind. Blank ignorance of the husband's profession was almost a social virtue. There was a rigid moral bulk-head between the life lived at home by the family and the life lived by the husband in The City.

I remember when Agnes' father vanished with the auctioneer's daughter Mrs. Gillow's position became one of complete incoherence.

Gillow had gone up to The City in the usual way in the usual manner one morning.

By the afternoon post there had come his letter to his wife saying that he would not return to The Hill, nor would he ever come into her life again. He explained he would make some sort of financial arrangement later, when he had gone into the matter, and he sent her ten pounds on account.

Mrs. Gillow came round to see my mother in a condition of melodramatic bewilderment. That feminine instinct that demands a chopping-block for wrath made her declare that there must be another woman. Beyond that and the facts of the letter she knew nothing. In the matters of her husband's commercial and financial condition she was vague to unsatisfaction.

"He gave me thirty pounds a month," she said tearfully, exaggerating by fifty per cent for the sake of her social status in a manner quite expected of her, "but what his income is I don't know. He never told me these things. . . . He paid the rent and light and coals and the subscription to Mudie's—no, I think I paid that—and the other things. He used to get angry when Jones and Higgins sent in bills for one or two things I bought there . . . but what was I to do on that money . . . ? And

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I *know* he had a very good income, only he never would tell me."

As a matter of fact she did not know at all, and she never had asked. She had lived for twenty years on a vague general knowledge that Gillow was Something in The City. She would tell you that his firm were exporters and packers, but what they packed and where it was exported to she had not the remotest idea. His exact status in the firm she could not define; perhaps that was the reason of her vagueness. He was certainly an employee, not a partner, and by wreathing his position in mists of indefiniteness she could speak of it in terms that could mean almost anything. And, as I say, her knowledge of his salary stopped short at the fact that he allowed her so much a month, and paid certain overhead charges. . . . She knew nothing at all. It was as though she were suspended from some great cloud that was all-supporting and all-sustaining, and all-obscuring.

She spent two hours of tears, fury and plaintiveness with my mother. She asked my mother if *she* could understand why a man should treat her thus, and since she refrained from showing Gillow's letter my mother could not even begin to offer clues for the husband's action. And she alternated this by threatening all the terrors of the law, and by asking what would become of her. She really had not the slightest inkling of what would become of her. After all these years she knew so little about her husband that she could not gauge his future attitude, and she was incapable of visualizing a future in which she would depend upon her own exertions.

In desperation my mother suggested sending a note by Owen, who was at home, to my father in order that he might go and see the husband and act as an intermediary. Mrs. Gillow jumped at the idea. It fell through because she did not know Mr. Gillow's City address.

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"I could take you to the office . . . right up to his room. Quite easily. But just now. . . . Well, I can't quite remember the exact address. We call it 'the warehouse,' you know, and it's in a road off one of those turnings that lead out of Leadenhall Street. I've been there so often. I know it quite well, only . . ."

It was Agnes who handled the whole of the bad business. Agnes, who had been in the country for a day, returned to face the abrupt tragedy that had devastated her family life. Young as she was then she faced the matter with her usual directness. She knew her father's City address, and she, and not an outsider, went to see him the next day.

She found out all about the "other woman," and she found out about her father's salary, and the allowance he could make from it. It was an abhorrent task for a young girl to perform, but actually its most trying phases arose not because of the father, but because of Mrs. Gillow.

Mr. Gillow had said decisively, in the beginning, of his wife,

"I won't see that woman. She suffocates me." And in a practical, common-sense way, without the slightest reference after the first explanations, to what had happened, he did try to provide for his wife in an equitable manner.

The attitude of the mother was exacting. She would first demand, "How could you bring yourself to speak to that *man*?" and before Agnes could answer, cry out, "Oh, I do hope you have put *all* the facts before him. I hope you have made him realize *everything*."

She was certain that Agnes could not have told him everything. The allowance that Gillow was going to make seemed to her to be proof positive that Agnes could not have made him appreciate the pitifulness of her position. The allowance seemed to her an insult. When Agnes pointed out that it was not possible for her father to give

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more without beggaring himself—since he, too, had to live—she said with a wail in her voice,

“He has plenty to live on. I know he has. He has a very good income.” The father had displayed a great deal of frankness. He had shown Agnes the figures of his earnings. She had, in fact, been rather impressed by the generosity he was showing in the circumstances. She told her mother that she did not think her father could give more. Her father’s income was a fair one, but it wasn’t a big one, and he could not spare more without suffering himself.

“He has got round you,” said Mrs. Gillow. “I know he has a very good income. I do wish I had gone myself.”

“If you press him for more it will mean that life is not worth living for him,” said Agnes.

“Why should life be worth living for him?” said Mrs. Gillow at a fierce tangent. “Look what he’s done to me! He should be made to suffer. And he shall suffer. I’ll see to that. The world will know. I shall get a divorce. I’ll expose him for what he is.”

Difficult for Agnes to make her see that if she got a divorce it would be all she would get. Divorce would mean that her father must lose his employment. If he lost his employment the mother would lose her allowance . . . it was a wearying business. Mrs. Gillow was in a *cul de sac*, as women of her class are usually in a *cul de sac* under such circumstances. She could do nothing without hurting herself. And she did not cease to bewail her lot, and her chief grievance was that she had been robbed of a very good income which she felt must be her husband’s though she had no grounds for her assertion, nor had she ever taken any practical steps to find out about it.

She always suspected Agnes of “being on her father’s side” after this, and no reasoning could make her feel otherwise. And in a curious way, too, Agnes had lost

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caste slightly with The Hill. It was acknowledged by those who knew the facts that she had handled the ugly happening with great credit, but it was that very fact that caused most people to treat her with a certain reserve. For a young girl of genteel upbringing she had handled the crisis with an unexpected sophistication.

Mrs. Gillow was, of course, an extreme case—but she was merely an extreme case of a general attitude. It was an unwritten law that women should be ignorant of the business side of their mankind. I doubt whether more than a small percentage knew the precise income of the money-getter. That was an Oriental secret kept from their ken. Our world was full of horrible shocks when wills came to be read, and women certain of prosperity found they had been living for years on the verge of a chasm of poverty, and had, in the future, to face the world without money.

And the women themselves kept up this Oriental attitude towards the man's business. They never tried to understand it. They actually shunned it as something not to be talked about, a thing not merely dull and masculine, but also mundane and derogatory. Some of the girls went to The City themselves; Agnes, of course, did after her father's elopement, and typed in a solicitor's office. They could talk business when they weren't too tired, but the rest shunned it as though it were pitch that might defile them.

Barbara was true to her kind. She was incorrigibly blank when I was inclined to talk about my work in Chancery Lane. She was interested in the fact that it was more dignified than "trade"; she was, at first, interested in the position and the affluence success in it would bring, but she wasn't interested in the work itself. She would say sometimes, as every woman of our circle did say,

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"Been busy in The City, Donald?" But that was a coined phrase of politeness. It invited no comment, no expositions of the factors that had made me busy, or had not.

IV

Really, looking back, I don't quite know what we did talk about. I myself slipped into the atmosphere which caused us not merely to refrain from discussing business, but made a virtue of that abstention. I felt with the rest that a man who brought commerce into the drawing-room was the sort who forgot the proprieties. I became uncomfortable and superior when any one became so vulgar, and my bearing undoubtedly showed my attitude. Once when Hugh and Bee had been discussing the monetary side of a Song Cycle he had composed with their usual unabashed publicity, Bee made some remark about my stiffness.

"Somebody had to remember the decencies," I told her loftily. "That sort of thing, you know—well, it really isn't usual, is it?"

"What a typical slug you're getting, Donald," said Bee, with that sort of kindness towards my soul which exasperated. "My dear child, you're shining with sleekness nowadays."

"A little of the slug wouldn't hurt you," I retorted. I meant the "you" to be plural, though I followed our attitude in ignoring Hugh as a personal factor. "To discuss intimate things before the whole world. . . ."

"Yes, I *can* understand why Agnes feels you are a disappointment," said my sister with dismaying feminine obliqueness.

"Oh, damn Agnes," I snapped, hating Agnes for that comment, and feeling that people of her sort, working in

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The City and all that, really hadn't any sense of the values of reputable and worthy living. And this was borne out by a suggestion, later, from Barbara, who had been present at the discussion, that it had been "rather common" of Hugh to talk as he did.

Though I was forced to make another shamefaced explanation of Hugh's queerness, I agreed with her. The discussion of such things seemed to me an outrage to the ideal of social deportment. All the same, knowing we did not discuss business, for the life of me I cannot remember what Barbara and I did talk about.

We saw a good deal of each other, always in public. We played tennis, we went to musical comedies, we went, now and then, to Queen's Hall, and for several years we visited the Royal Academy as a sort of social ritual, strange outings that come down to me as memories of headaches from eye-strain, cream buns eaten in the subterranean lavatory-like tea room of Burlington House, and a pointed oblivion of any picture in the nude. I have always had a passion for the nude, but though we could see all the pictures round a Venus or a Psyche we never saw the naked bodies. It was as though Nature, to meet the peculiar requirements of The Hill, had so ordered our eyesight that all such canvases appeared blank, or, anyhow, appeared blank when we walked the Academy floor in company with the other sex of The Hill. . . . They were quite perceptible when I sneaked back on another day to assuage my craving for such pictures.

The Academy and the rest must have given us matters for conversation, but I can't recall one subject we had in common, save that Barbara was beautiful and I loved her.

There was gossip, of course; we must have kept up an unending stream of gossip through the years, a ceaseless rill of trivial comment on the doings about us. We dwelt

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with gusto upon the fact that the Welbins had floriated into a motor car. We tried to smother with superciliousness our envy of the Curlings when they adopted a much better car than the Welbins possessed, and also bought one of the best houses on The Hill. The fact that Owen had taken a slight twist away from muscles and had plunged with a sort of pent-up fury into the use, mechanics and dialect of a motor cycle, helped us to pretend that the Curlings had merely followed late the universal fashion. As to that sumptuous house, we drew attention to the fact that if Mr. and Mrs. Curling did keep a butler, it was also obvious that they could not keep intact the King's English. That was the tone of our running comment. We were always accusing people of "putting on too much side," or accusing others of putting on too little, and forgetting what was becoming to The Hill.

V

We found something to talk of with a shamefaced gusto in the action of Hugh and Bee.

With a calmness which we found monstrous and baffling the imperturbable pair had gone their own way in the face of all we and The Hill might think. We had done our best in our recognized way to treat Hugh as something nonexistent, or at the most, as part of a sort of indefinite caprice of Bee's. Our manner did not react. Bee had coolly marched through our mist of hints and innuendo with the settled bearing of one who had made up her mind without even remembering we existed. We heard occasional snacks of dread marital talk . . . mention of flats and furniture, as well as that showing of undraped intimacy in the discussion of Hugh's Song Cycle and the income it would bring. We tried to ignore these things. We felt that Bee must know that she was not going to

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marry Hugh. But Bee would not see what "everybody" saw. When my mother said,

"You really should be more discreet, Beatrice," Bee answered in a tone of surprise, "About what?" That is, she forced my mother to be almost precise in a matter best "left unsaid." My mother stared in a rather hurt manner, and said with dignity,

"People *do* talk, you know, Bee. For a girl to be coupled with a man. . . ."

"Well, that's what it'll come to in the end," said Bee, "so I don't see that it matters now."

Struck in the face, as it were, by this indelicate boldness, my mother answered,

"I wish you'd talk seriously sometimes," and returned with sedulous concentration to a book by Madame Albanesi.

Bee, not a bit abashed, flew in the face of providence, and walked steadily towards a marriage with an impossible musician. As I explained in many talks with Barbara, we did our best to show her that the sort of thing she was bent on doing was not the sort of thing that our kind of people were expected to do. It made no impression upon her, and when, one day, she flaunted a diamond ring on the categorical finger, we realized that the affair had reached a crisis and must be taken firmly in hand. We hated that ring, as decent bureaucrats might hate a bomb that had been planted in their midst, and was about to explode in a manner to disturb them with the maximum unpleasantness. We were askance. We told each other that this was going too far.

My mother must have had private talks with Bee. What she said I do not know, but she must have been dignified and very tactful. Anyhow it was without a hint of rebellion that Bee one evening swung round on Hugh as we young people sat in the drawing-room, and said,

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"I say, Hugh, you've got to see the Guv'nor."

"All right," he answered serenely, "and what about?"

"About me. You've got to ask him for my hand and heart." Owen and I gasped, and Owen growled, "Look here, Bee, that's a bit too thick. Chuck it." Hugh, undecided how to take her, said,

"You're not funning, are you, Bee?"

"No. It's gospel. It's expected."

Hugh stared at her, and decided that she was speaking seriously.

"But I thought all that sort of thing was done away with ages ago," he said, speaking with the genuine surprise that would come to any man abruptly confronted with a dodo.

"So did I," agreed Bee, "but it isn't. In fact the Guv'nor has been rather upset because you didn't go earlier. You'd better go along now before he settles down to the *St. James'*."

"Right-o," said Hugh, without a tremor. "He's in the dining room?"

He got up at once and walked out of the drawing room with no more excitement than if he were going to catch a tram. Owen and I sat and stared at our sister, so taken aback that we could find nothing to say.

The interview must have been a cataclysmic experience for my father. He was not at all ready for it, he had not even stage-managed his emotions to cope with it. From what I gathered later my mother and father, in talking over the "disaster" of the ring that morning, had agreed that the best way to bring the matter to a head was for my father to "have it out" with Hugh. My father, in the *mañana* habit of his kind, had said that he would speak his mind to "that young fellow," when "that young fellow" asked formally for permission to marry Beatrice.

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He was quite confident that Hugh would ask formally in due course, and he left it in the vague future. My mother knew better. She knew that such a process had never occurred to Hugh or my sister. They were full of absurd modern ideas about only wanting to marry each other, not the whole families of each other, and they thought the business lay entirely between themselves. My mother did not approve the attitude, but she recognized its existence. So that afternoon she spoke to Bee, telling her that Hugh must speak to my father, for it was the proper thing to do, and that my father was expecting it.

My mother had not expected to precipitate action; with her, too, such a hint relegated a crisis to the vague future. But she had reckoned without the disastrously direct pair, with the result that my father, prepared only for a comfortable, somnolent evening, found himself projected with the violence of an unexpected earthquake into the discussion of Bee's marriage.

I have heard since exactly what happened, but even at the time I had a very good conception of what occurred in that moment when my father was about to sink into the comfort of an ordinary evening.

VI

My father, with a sense of the smooth and gracious serenity stretching between him and his bedtime, was settling down to his paper and his pipe, when the young man, to whom, secretly, he was antipathetic, but to whom outwardly, since he was a guest, he exhibited geniality, came into the room. My father resented his coming, wondered why the devil he had come, thought that he wanted to fetch something, and would go out at once. He hoped so anyhow. But being polite he made a show of friendliness; he said,

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"Hallo, Hugh, my boy, dropped in to say howd'y' do? That's good." He smiled cautiously, so that Hugh should have no real excuse to stay, and found himself stunningly involved in a proposal for the hand and marriage of his daughter. He was mentally winded. There was nothing about Hugh to give him a hint, no wobbling at the knees, no nervousness, no anxious perspiration, no incoherence or stammering in speech. Hugh said easily,

"Before you settle down for the evening, sir, I wanted to speak to you. Bee and I have decided to get married."

My father simply goggled. He had nothing formulated. He could only gasp,

"What the—why—why I haven't thought about it yet," which was perfectly true. He had meant to think of it steadily for days and days, bit by bit, piecing the whole of his argument together into a solid, unshakable structure.

He was a man without a weapon in his hand, or shield on his arm, standing before an enemy.

I suppose Hugh saw his perturbation, and in the usual way of youth tried to make it easy for his elder.

"No, sir, of course, you had other things to think of. But Bee and I have thrashed it all out very thoroughly. We should be glad of your approval, sir."

There is no denying that Hugh took an unexpected attitude. He talked of the thing as though it were all settled. He did this quite candidly, because for himself and Bee it was. But his *ex cathedra* tone stiffened my father, helped him to pull himself together; helped him, too, to grasp at a way to end this abrupt interview.

"I will have to—er—I will have to consider the matter well and deeply." His voice told Hugh that he could go, and that the business would be taken up again at a later date.

"Thank you, sir," said Hugh. "We—I thought we

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should speak to you about it. We should like you to approve of our marriage."

"I don't say I will," said my father rashly. "I think I had better say frankly—but well—it will have to be considered very carefully in all its aspects."

I suppose his tone must have warned Hugh, for he answered,

"I assure you, sir, we have done that—very carefully—Bee and I."

"Bee," said my father with more decision, "Bee is very young."

I suppose every father has said and thought that of his daughter when she was asked in marriage. Bee was then older than my mother was when she married. My father overlooked that, but Hugh did not.

"Not so very young, sir, surely? My mother and hers married much earlier. Beatrice is twenty-two, sir."

My father undoubtedly thought this an impertinence. He thought the reference to his own marriage was a reference to something in an entirely different category. In some way, probably because it had happened to him, his marriage with my mother was a solid, holy, and circumstantial affair when compared with all the marriages that happened after it—especially this gimcrack suggestion of "people young enough to be his children." He said, meaning to be satirical,

"The circumstances—I think—are rather different nowadays."

"I think they are, too," said Hugh quite candidly. "We're rather more practical, I fancy. We don't rush in in our teens. We wait and look about a bit, and we don't take things so much on chance, but go into them."

"Eh?" gasped my father, at the unexpectedness of this. "Eh . . . oh . . . that's what you think. . . . You think that?"

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"I can only go by my own case, naturally," said Hugh, as one weighing a polemical point . . . "that and the fact that people don't so often marry at eighteen or nineteen as they did in my mother's time. They wait until at least the twenties. I think that means that people don't want to go into marriage offhand. I know Bee and I have not. We've been going into it for several years, hammering it out thoroughly. . . ."

"IT . . . ?" gasped my dazed father.

"Our marriage, sir. We decided right away in the beginning there was no good making a muck of things. We were extraordinarily fond of each other, but that was no reason for diving straight into an existence that in a few years might be one of mutual misery. . . . I mean after the first bloom wore off, you know, sir."

My father didn't really know anything. He was sitting staring at this amazing young man with a mind mesmerized and bewildered by astonishment. He did not utter a word.

"At first we thought it wouldn't come to anything," went on Hugh, explaining with an earnestness that made him oblivious of the effect he was causing. "We were perfectly aware of our faults. I'm rather exacting in some things, will have my own point of view. And Bee is inclined to be rigid occasionally. We saw how we would clash, and that seemed to make the thing hopeless. We did, as a matter of fact, agree not to go on. But that meant not seeing each other, and we found we couldn't bear that. So we decided to give ourselves a trial. We gave ourselves a run of two years—while I was finding my feet, in fact. In that time we considered we should either have clashed ourselves apart, or worn down the things that clashed . . . and that's what has happened, sir."

Hugh looked at my father, smiling, awaiting a friendly annotation. My father could not speak, he only stared.

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"We found that the things, the inharmonies, we thought mattered so enormously, don't matter at all . . . and so it was all right."

My father could only say,

"Oh, yes, I see . . . oh, yes." Then he pulled himself together, not to repulse Hugh, but to give a hint that the interview was ended. As usual his driving force had evaporized, and he wanted to be left to himself. "Oh, yes," he said again, "I quite understand that. But—er—there are other things, other aspects that—er—that will have to be gone into."

"Of course, the financial side," said Hugh, and I think he can be excused of denseness. He really did think this was a definitive, if old-fashioned and meaningless, interview. "I think you will feel that it is satisfactory, sir."

On the principle that now it was here he might as well go into it, my father changed his tone of dismissal to one of attention. Possibly he was sure that this was a battlefield upon which he could defeat Hugh decisively. Also, he had his fair share of curiosity regarding other men's incomes. He said,

"That obviously is a most important point. My daughter has been accustomed to the surroundings of a good and comfortable home, as you know. She has had everything she wanted within our means . . . she has not been pinched, nor has she known what it is to go ill-dressed, or short of the amenities of life, and so on. In considering the matter I should want to know if you could—er—provide for her, as . . ."

"I think there is no danger of that, sir," broke in Hugh. "I am doing very well, I think. I earn about fifteen hundred pounds a year."

My father jumped.

"Did you say fifteen hundred pounds a year?" he cried.

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"I hope it will be more each year as time goes on—that is the average for the last three years."

My father sat back and said,

"God bless my soul!"

Hugh, evidently thinking that the figure had come below my father's estimate, went on quickly,

"That should be exceeded very easily this year. My Song Cycle has gone well, and my work has a vogue. I think I can safely say it will be exceeded materially. I have about two thousand seven hundred pounds in shares and in my deposit account at the bank. I am insured for a thousand pounds, with profits."

In answer to all this my father said,

"Do you mean fifteen hundred pounds a year—regularly?"

"As far as I can average it. It was very much more this year, rather more last, under the year before that. But as my royalties accumulate, and I get new songs out, I think that is a fair minimum figure for the year. But as I say, as time goes on, . . ."

"How old are you?" asked my father.

"Twenty-six," said Hugh.

"God bless my soul," said my father once more. He stared at Hugh. He was rather glad he had not made a fool of himself by dwelling upon the way he had provided for Beatrice. As he stared he asked, "Do all musicians make incomes of this kind?" He was beginning to wonder if he had been living in a paradise of the prejudiced.

"I've had great good luck, sir," said Hugh. "I'm afraid most don't. Some make very much more—real fortunes—but on the whole most earn only a miserable pittance."

My father sat back and sighed. His attitude hadn't been altogether wrong, then.

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"And you expect that your present rate of earning will continue, may increase?"

"That is the logic of the thing. If one had the luck to strike a vein that goes, then one's circle expands naturally as one writes more and more. One's income, too; obviously one's royalties accumulate. . . ."

"I fear it is not obvious to me," said my father. "You have used that term about accumulating royalties twice. What do you mean by it exactly?"

"Oh, the royalties on the songs one has written, and left behind so to speak. Every song I write is published on a royalty basis, you see. It goes on earning royalties while people buy it, though it may be years old. For instance, one of the songs I wrote seven years ago is still selling steadily, not largely but steadily . . . people will sing it in drawing-rooms. I am still getting money from that. And every additional song I write is doing the same thing, sometimes, of course, only to a very minor degree, but the fact is that the more songs I publish the more trickles of royalties there are to accumulate behind me—even though I am actually doing nothing to earn them now, but am going on to earn more. That's what I mean, sir."

My father was profoundly disturbed by the unexpected affluence of a man who was not merely young, but a musician.

He sat quietly, contemplating the ruin of his line of battle, trying to evolve some new order into it. Hugh, in his entirely candid way, having stated the profit side, felt it only honorable to give the loss.

"There is, of course, the factor of something happening. I might get ill and stop working. There might be a slump in my popularity."

"Ah," breathed my father.

"One must face everything," said Hugh.

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"Of course, of course. The only wise attitude," agreed my father, feeling stronger.

"We've faced it," said Hugh calmly. "Bee and I have hammered that out, too. We think that if we begin on a small scale—in a flat, for example, and live very quietly for the next five years we should have enough behind us to assure our future—even should I have no outstanding success, which is always a possibility. I think we can do that. We are both thrifty, and we both know what we want."

For a time both were silent. My father, whose opposition had been flicked awake again by the mention of Bee, then said,

"That is reasonable and feasible. That is the thing to do."

Both men were silent again.

Again my father had reached a point when he wished to close the matter. Again he evolved a sentence of dismissal.

"Well, we've gone into matters. We must think it over. There are many points to study." Hugh stood looking at my father, frowning a little in perplexity, wondering what those other points were, what he had overlooked. My father saw the frown, and answered it vaguely. "There are other things involved, other things than the financial and, shall we say, temperamental side."

"I will answer any questions you like to put," said Hugh, feeling, with a sort of amused tolerance, that while he played this old-fashioned game he might as well play it thoroughly.

My father really had no questions to ask, he was only anxious to get rid of Hugh and his intolerable honesty. The way to have accomplished that would have been to say in a candid way, "Look here, I'll think this over, I'll talk to you later." Hugh would have understood that. But

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that directness was impossible to us, impossible to my father. He could not be clear cut. With him things had to fade out in an undisturbing vagueness. So that though he meant nothing at all when he said,

"Yes, there are certain other points that will need going into," the foggy air of mystery he put into that sentence, the way he glanced down at his folded hands (it was really a glance of desire at the paper they held) gave to his whole bearing the suggestion that the points that needed going into were very grave points indeed, points that, even in a discussion between man and man, one approached with delicacy and distaste. Indeed that was the way Hugh read the signs, and it must be remembered that he did consider this an interview of crucial importance.

"I suppose you refer to my private life, sir," he said. "I have a clean bill there."

My father, terrified at what this strangely candid young fellow might say next, waved his hand anxiously, and Hugh read that gesture wrongly.

"I know musicians, and artists generally are suspect—I think wrongly . . . but I'll speak of myself. I've never had an affair with a woman. Frankly, I've been too busy. And, anyhow, I don't think I'm inclined towards that sort of thing. Of course, in a matter of this kind one cannot give proofs, but I assure you on my honor, sir, I've never even on a single occasion been with . . ."

My poor father must have been very near apoplexy at that moment. The shock of that coldly earnest confession must have disturbed him unspeakably. How he managed to check the candid and devastating flow, I can't conceive. But he did. He managed to blurt out,

"Yes . . . yes . . . I do take your word. Please . . . I accept your assurance. . . ."

Hugh cried,

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"But, of course, I can give you a doctor's certificate. I'll go to my man to-morrow."

"My dear boy . . . my dear boy . . ." gasped my father, "please, leave it at that."

"Anyhow, I am a first-class life as far as insurance goes."

"Of course . . . of course. . . ."

"As for impulses . . . I have not yet experienced them to a degree I can't resist. I think I am as safe as any man can be for the future, I mean sexually . . . then I hate cards . . . never play. I smoke reasonably. I don't drink, that is, spirits or beer, only light wine at meals. Horse-racing and all that sort of thing don't interest me. I can't make these things virtues, but they are facts."

"Very creditable . . . very creditable, too," stuttered my father.

"Is there anything else, sir?"

"Nothing. . . . Nothing . . . most complete. . . ." And then my father did pull himself together. He had been shocked into precise statement. "And I must think it over. Really, you *must* give me time to think it over. . . ."

VII

As I say, that interview was simply cataclysmic to my father. He felt, morally, as if he had been in a rough-and-tumble with a footpad of a strenuous kind. He was not merely angry with Hugh, he was shocked. He looked upon Hugh as something naked and indecent—in fact, Hugh's manner had been singularly naked. The comfort of the evening vanished in a fume of bewildered antipathy, in which he thought more or less incoherently of "that amazing young man. . . . That preposterous young fellow . . . My dear, in all my experience. . . . No, I've

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never encountered anything like it . . . the fellow's amazing." He expressed himself to my mother in this way, for he had called her in to give vent to his emotions. And I suppose, thanks to the violence of his mental disturbance, he must have expressed himself to his cronies. Anyhow, the thing got about, the strange unashamedness of Hugh became a topic, and the attitude of The Hill towards Hugh and Bee grew distinctly dignified.

And the Majors and Barbara caught the contagion. I was received as of old but in a manner which told me that indeed I was a brother of that queer, unprincipled girl, Beatrice Harbour. Barbara showed a reluctance in meeting the condemned pair. She sidled out of any engagement which would bring her into contact with Bee. The chill had spread to me. It was a time of acute misery. Barbara was so distant, and I never seemed to meet her. And even when I met her, she was on her guard, as though I were suspect, and might break out into any kind of infamy at any moment. And I had to explain . . . always that litany of explaining things away, of showing that I was one with my class in decorum and dignity, that I disapproved of this violation of all we knew to be "nice." I told Barbara, forcing her to speak of the thing she more than carefully evaded,

"The whole thing is simply absurd, of course."

"Rather disgusting," murmured Barbara, with a little shudder, as though to suggest that if it was that to her what must it be to me who was actually wallowing in it.

"Bee's a little fool," I snapped, wanting to spank my sister. "Hugh Bernard has simply filled her head with his mad ideas."

"What can you expect of a musician?" said Barbara.

I made a gesture of agreement, a gesture which also conveyed to her that I could not politely express my opinions of musicians before her.

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"How could your mother have allowed a—a man like that to the house?" she said. And I saw that we were all contaminated, we had lost caste by the fact that we had allowed this fellow lacking restraint or principle to share our friendship.

"How were we to know?" I said. "Who'd have thought he was like that. . . . His people are quite decent. . . . He went to Edmundsbury. . . ."

"Still . . . a musician . . ." said Barbara.

"Oh, well," I said, trying now to get away from a topic that seemed bound to incriminate me. "It's going to be stopped. We're not going to countenance this sort of thing."

"Of course not. . . ."

"Of course we can't allow it to go on. . . . Let's get away from it. . . . Have you seen the new piece at the Gaiety? I thought of getting seats for next Saturday. . . ."

"Oh—Jimmy Curling is coming round next Saturday . . . I think. He wants to take us all to Sevenoaks in his car. . . ."

Jimmy Curling, that impossible outsider, was cropping up more and more. I loathed him. But I loathed Hugh more. Hugh had given Curling his chance. I was furious with the pair who were making people look at us, draw away from us, the pair who had outraged all our settled principles.

Of course the whole business had to end. It couldn't possibly go on.

VIII

But it did go on. Bee and Hugh went on quite serenely, taking the whole thing for granted. To us they were incorrigibly barefaced. To them their marriage was an accepted fact, and they discussed it with candor.

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They talked of flats in Chelsea. They talked of furniture. They talked of twin-beds. . . . twin-beds instead of a single double bed, which was unhygienic. With a colossal coolness, Bee said,

"I'm not going to have anybody turning over and dragging all the clothes off me on a cold night."

"Oh, Lord, no," agreed Hugh, "I should simply hate that, too."

"Beatrice!" cried my mother in horror. "Really you forget what is respectable . . . beds, in mixed company. It's positively indecent."

Talk like that, the calm attitude of decision . . . it was scandalous. And they did it quite shamelessly before anybody. People were commenting. I argued furiously with my mother. I told her that this impossible thing could not go on.

"I've talked to Beatrice," said my mother wearily. "I've told her how we feel about it, how everybody must look at it."

"What's her attitude?"

"She thinks it's all rather amusing."

"Amusing!" I burst. "I suppose she realizes we won't let her marry the fellow?"

"You've heard her talk—about beds. . . . Does that sound as though she realized?"

"But she must be told bluntly we won't allow it."

"That won't make any difference. She knows she's twenty-two; she can do as she likes, and she means to."

"But can't you send her away—to Aunt Heppy in Gloucester, for instance?"

"I couldn't suggest that. . . . She'd accuse me of getting the idea from an old-fashioned novel. Also, she wouldn't go."

"Where would she go, if—if we told her—only threatened of course, she must leave the house?"

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"She's already suggested . . . after I had a talk with her, you know, that she should get a room somewhere and live there until she married."

"The little beast. She suggested that; how unthinkable!"

"She thought it might save us trouble. She truly wanted to go."

"That's melodrama," I sneered, strong in my knowledge of how we did things in our circle. "Where could she possibly get the money?"

"From Hugh," said my mother.

"What!" I cried.

"Oh, he'd already made the suggestion."

"But that's vile . . . doesn't she see how disgustingly immoral that would make her?"

"They don't see things as we see them," said my mother with a sigh. "They don't seem to have any ideas of what is becoming or proper. . . . Bee couldn't find anything wrong in it; she sees no difference in taking his money before marriage from taking it after."

"Well, after that we can at least forbid his coming to the house."

"Oh, no. They would meet elsewhere . . . and people would talk. No, we must try to keep things respectable, and hope for the best."

"I don't see anything to hope for," I growled. "They'll go on with their infernal coolness, and marry."

"They're going to be married in a month's time—Bee told me to-day they'd fixed it up. A quiet wedding at ten o'clock in the morning. They're catching a train to Southwold, or somewhere, at eleven o'clock."

"They've fixed it up without consulting you, or father?"

"Fathers and mothers don't count for much nowadays," said my mother acidly.

We were both silent.

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"I suppose they'll be married from this house?"

"I insisted on that. They wanted to do away with it. A taxi to the church, and another to the station. But there I did put my foot down . . . what *would* people say?"

That was our chiefest anxiety, to prevent people saying things, or rather saying too many things; already they were busy with us, commenting on our scandal with that air of pity which lends such talk so great a relish. . . . Already I had heard some of it. One day as I was putting on my coat in the hall of the Majors' house I heard Mrs. Major saying,

"But so sad, don't you think? Quite . . . quite nice people, really. And Mr. Harbour has such a good position. . . . Yes, Beatrice has become so coarse. She talks in such an unblushing manner about—well—indelicate things."

Mrs. Major did not realize her drawing-room door was ajar, but I don't know that that mattered very much. We knew people were talking like that. I know I huddled into my coat rapidly and left the house limp with misery. . . . Barbara had not been there. She had gone to the military tournament with Curling.

'And I knew why she had gone with him, and not with me.

CHAPTER IV

I

BEE'S marriage was mitigated by the fact that the sixpenny weeklies, such as the *Sketch* and the *Illustrated London News*, seemed to think she had done something of importance. They printed her portrait as the newly-wedded wife of the distinguished Song Writer, Hugh Bernard. The *Daily Mirror* also published portraits, calling Hugh "the famous musician," but we discounted the adjective on the grounds that for popularity's sake more had to be given for a ha'penny. This celebrity no doubt partly arose from the fact that one of Hugh's songs had become epidemic. No "At Home" at that time seemed to be able to actuate without it.

These facts gave a new aspect to the union, and The Hill, forgetting its previous reprobation, shamelessly adopted it. People who had been frosty and distant came flocking to the house, and sat and purred. They were eager to catch some glow from Beatrice's glory. The love affair which had been indelicate now became a charming caprice. Its shamelessness became romance.

"So unconventional of them," said Mrs. Major. "These Bohemians . . . so delightfully unconventional. And it was just like dear Beatrice. Really, I don't think I would have expected her to do anything else. . . ."

They all cooed about my mother. And they bought copies of Hugh's chronic song, and displayed the *Sketch* in their drawing-rooms. They told my mother that they supposed they'd see something of that charming Mr. Hugh

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some day, and asked her to be sure to give them a chance of meeting him again . . . his music . . . so distinctive, so delicious. And they asked ALL about a dinner where, according to the society columns of the newspapers, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Bernard had been guests together with people possessing shining and authentic titles . . . and we looked human and told them as little as we could, for Bee had told us practically nothing, not because she owed us a grudge, but because it was her way to treat such things in an offhand manner.

The thing I resent most now is that I didn't loathe these people, that we took it all without disgust. We actually liked it. We preened ourselves, took on a smug air of satisfaction. We were as bad as any one, for we forgot our former attitude, and purred in the glamour, too. We sucked it all in, took it all as a matter of course.

I remember during the claret cup interval of a whist drive I sat by Agnes Gillow, listening to honeyed comment, and answering in glowing terms gossip concerning the romantic marriage of Bee. I remember Agnes had remained silent, watching me, her curious, upright vigorousness concentrated upon my manner and my answers to the gushing talk that bathed me. And in a moment when I was unoccupied, I heard her say in a tone of reflective surprise,

"No—I don't believe it *does* make you sick."

"What should make me sick?" I asked.

"All this gush about Bee."

"I don't understand."

"They're simply nauseating."

"Are they?" I said distantly. "I think they are being rather nice. They're frightfully interested and quite charming."

In her eyes there was a real perplexity. She stared at me as though she were not quite certain what kind of

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animal I was. She looked superb. The glowing texture of her white, opaque skin, the curiously budding yet smooth fluency of her throat, shoulders and breast gave her at once a delicious softness as well as an astounding vitality.

"Don't you think it's nice of everybody to be so interested about Bee?" I demanded.

"But, Donald—don't you remember what they were saying a few weeks ago? They were beastly."

How extraordinarily ill-bred of her to bring that up, I thought.

"My dear Agnes," I said in a consequent tone, "surely that need not be dragged in."

She looked at me and then sank back with a sigh.

"Oh, well, I suppose you *have* become one of them yourself," she said. "You don't find all this insincere and dishonest?" She looked at me steadily with her candid eyes, then, with a shrug that seemed to put an end to me, she turned to her neighbor. I resented that shrug intensely. It was almost immodest to shrug like that at a man who had never been anything to her.

I shrugged too, rather an afterthought of a shrug, and showed the proud rectitude of my feelings by leaving her side and going across the room to where Barbara sat.

Barbara shifted a little on her rout-seat to make room for me, disentangling herself from Curling's conversation. She said something about Hugh's latest song, and put the type of leading question which enabled me to describe the exalted doings of my sister. My complete satisfaction in the state of things brought about by Bee's marriage was restored.

II

Indeed, I had my own reasons for being glad that Bee had married Hugh. It was a time when my stock seemed

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particularly low. The fact that Barbara had shown a strange addiction to that definitely unprepossessing young coal merchant, Curling, made up part of my depression. But it was really deeper than that. It arose from my work . . . indeed, even Barbara's deviation towards the Mammon of Kitchen Brights had its beginning in that; Bee's rebellion against the proprieties had merely provided an apposite excuse.

My work—it is difficult to say what was happening there. I cannot say that I was a failure in it, because, actually, I was doing well enough; quite as well as, perhaps even better than, hundreds of young architects. It was, in its way, a success, only it wasn't the success I had planned. My ambition wasn't working out. . . . And yet I wasn't altogether dissatisfied. Though it wasn't working out as I had dreamed—and had dreamed aloud to Barbara—I had by then become man of the world enough to see that dreams had the habit of not coming true, that ambitions, however definite and clear to the eye of the untried beginner, are subject to constant modification and depression in actual, practical, everyday living.

I could see that I had seen my vision with the unrecking optimism of youth. I had set out a straight line to a goal as though I were alone in the world without rivals or any adverse circumstances to check me. My goal was imposing and auriferous. I was to sweep grandly through the office of Messrs. Hall Milne and Baddick, and out of it. I was to start an office of my own, and expand. Great public buildings, great churches should be my particular function. And the great name and the great income that went with this sort of thing would follow naturally. A pretentious dream, no doubt, and probably I never quite saw myself fulfilling all its glories. But I did feel that if I leaped high at these mundane stars, I should at least lift myself above the common ruck . . . I would attain a

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height to which admiring eyes must be lifted. I would at least become a figure; some one solid and important whose peculiar and individual attainments were regarded with awe, and whose financial status was a thing of envy to the circle in which we lived.

I did see a distinguished and individual future for—for, well, Barbara's husband. And in actual practice it wasn't working out.

As Bee in her cool way put it, I was aiming at palaces and hitting pubs.

The whole of my plan with regard to Hall Milne's office, and my leaving it for one of my own went awry. I didn't leave it. What is more, I did not sweep grandly through it. I don't know whether I carried the circum-spect atmosphere of The Hill into the bare, high-up office that looked down into the narrow cañon of the Lane, where the omnibuses splashed pedestrians so liberally in wet weather, or whether that office had always been one with The Hill in its atmosphere, but it seems to me that there was something there that blunted enthusiasms . . . or, perhaps it was I who developed the wrong enthusiasms myself, for certainly I recall an air of keenness of zest, of sympathy, of encouragement in my first intense days of my work there.

But whether this was actual or merely the novelty of the experience, I do not know; anyhow, the emotion wore down, or maybe I wore it down and the work became hum-drum. There was a steadiness, a lack of illusion about our attack on matters in hand that was very near to disillusion. And Hall Milne himself, a tall, parched fellow whose coloring and very figure always made me think of weather-stained baste, soon lost geniality, and became my "boss" pure and simple. (Baddick, an "anybody" man, with a high forehead too white for his ruddy cheeks was always a figure in the background.) Hall Milne gave

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me work to do, and plenty of it, but as time went on seemed to expect nothing more from me but steady and accurate composition along well-worn defined lines.

Yes, contact with realities cools the blood and enables one to accept the commonplace which is the lot of man. I sat at my high trestle-table with my T square and my dividers and my pencils, applying my growing knowledge of the theory and practice of architecture to the work in hand as the years went on until it had become a mechanical and unquestioning concentration.

It was a bare office, without carpet and without decoration. For architects of taste the paper was excruciating, but it was a fixture rented with the suite of rooms, and it was characteristic of our mundane outlook that we did not bother about such matters. If I looked up, I saw through a big window the red-brick houses on the other side of Chancery Lane. A featureless view. The window immediately opposite was occupied by a solicitor, and he had no esthetic value. He worked resolutely and ceaselessly. Now and then I could see his hands waving as he expounded the law to a client that his uncleaned windows rendered invisible. At nighttime he pulled the electric lamp on his desk as close to him as possible, and then donned a green eye-shade to shut it out.

I had my window and my room to myself. I had served for a time in the big outer office to the rear with windows facing a dirty, blank, glazed wall across an alley. Here there were the several clerks who made tracings, drew up specifications, bills of quantities, and generally managed the administration side of the office. They were quite a pleasant lot, who took a hearty but, I considered, less expert interest in all the athletics I enjoyed. I got on quite well with them, but there was a thin film of reticence between us, arising from the fact that I was articled and they were hired.

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In due time I was given the room at the front of the house, partly because no other use could be found for it, partly because another articulated clerk dawned on the firm. His name was Nottige, and he did not stay long. He was a wind-blown youth, rather short and very tight in his garments. He had no particular interest in architecture. He always got India ink on his cheekbones, and was always wanting me to go with him to see highly secular plays on Sunday afternoons. His mind seemed to be a sort of Scandinavian blur. On Monday morning he was usually in a cold, damp ecstasy of unbridled passion, and his fixed and pulpy face would poke towards me while he poured out a stream of memories, mainly Strindberg, of his previous afternoon's enjoyment. The mere sight of him convinced me that the modern "advanced" movement was entirely wrong.

When he left I had the room entirely to myself. I worked steadily there at my studies and my training. I worked there after I had qualified as an architect. It was in this room that I tackled my ambition for large things. . . . Was I sidetracked in that ambition, or was I simply carried along by the stream away from it? It is not easy to say. Also, it is not easy to follow a determined line in an architect's office. An architect takes what comes to him. True, he takes part in competitions for important and august buildings, but he does so with hope rather than faith in his heart. Occasionally his design wins a competition, and a certain expanding ripple of business may result. On the whole, he depends on what he can pick up through the interest of his friends, through the recommendations of those he has already pleased, through an exterior appreciation of his work. Quite frequently he finds a steady clientele in a settled line of design into which he has either dropped by sheer luck, or because he has some special capacity for that kind of thing.

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III

I don't know whether Hall Milne had a peculiar capacity for designing pubs; I don't know whether just about the time I began to work for him and his partner he had settled into the groove of such kind of composition. I only know that from the beginning my thoughts were switched away from other ideals towards pubs. There was other work. There was that Guardians' building, a lyric moment, never repeated; there was a coöperative block I did for a northern town, and there were other different but not exalted compositions that came under my hand, including a Nonconformist chapel or two. But as far as I was concerned the world that needed roofs and walls was mainly made up of pubs.

An endless succession of pubs kept me occupied through the years.

They were of all types and conditions. There were the slightly romantic inns in the country, or at holiday places demanding a certain grace, a certain prettiness in design—it was my first success with buildings of this kind that settled me into the cult. There were highly mundane hotels in town, where the esthetic appearance was merely part of the plan to draw clients, and was never indulged beyond the bare necessities of the case. There were thoroughly utilitarian pubs in industrial centers in which glazed tiles formed the summit of the decorative ideal, on the principle that they not only satisfied the uncritical eye, but were also washable. Pubs, always pubs, fell to me as my share of the office work, though I knew that several churches, quite a number of attractive country houses, to say nothing of fairly important imperial and local government buildings, were handled by the firm. I suppose, stoically, I accepted these as the “perks” of the “Guv'nors.” What were Hall Milne, a capable but not

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inspired designer, and Baddick, who had a faculty for Gothic that surprised those who saw his curiously ruddy face, in control for, if they were not to pick the titbits?

And yet I wonder? . . .

They were neither of them stupid men. Neither of them was likely to stand in the way of their underlings simply because they felt they should handle all the important buildings themselves.

That would not appeal to their highly efficient business instincts. It was all one to them who made the drawings as long as the firm got the credit. They were ready to give their underlings full scope. After my success with the Guardians' building I remember that other important jobs came my way. I recall a sort of wallow in the neoclassic, a period when my ambition for big things flourished rankly and I planned massive structures that seemed to me to combine all that was best in such models as St. George's Hall, Liverpool, and the National Gallery, Edinburgh, in a whole that left the imperfections of such designs far behind. . . . I dabbled in Wren and Cockerell, and found suggestions in Inigo Jones, Dance and Palladio; from Elmes I got the idea of looking into Egyptian architecture, and I found some excitement in adapting bud and spreading capitals to my pillars, and even in experimenting with the strange columns Thotmes III introduced into the temple of Karnak. This was the phase when I really thought I was leaping to the stars . . . but it evaporated. It did not go out abruptly, it simply faded into routine. Plans entered in competitions were rejected; that was half expected; selection boards were notoriously conservative. Other plans came under the hands of Hall Milne, and he allowed his discretion to play over them . . . he modified them, adapted them to his own ideal, he utilized them as a basis for a general design, he allowed them to gather dust on shelves. . . .

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No, I did not rebel, it was all in the day's work. It was part of the actuality of life, that ruthless force which curbed and pruned unconsidered ambitions. I don't say that I liked this subduing of my aspirations, but my feelings were not violent. There was even a sort of complaisance in my acceptance of rebuffs. I was a man of the world, I adopted mahatma airs . . . it was only an inferior mind that kicked up a shindy, and adopted vapping attitudes under these circumstances. It was no good wearing oneself out with vain depression, one had to accept the world as it was and regulate the mind to the circumstances. If one could not do city halls or cathedrals, then one did what one could. I did what I could. I designed pubs. The tide of pubs flowed over me again, and in my steady work on them the bigger things faded slowly from my mental horizon. After all, poetic ideals were no doubt glamorous, but *did* they lead to a decent house in a decent neighborhood, and good furniture and three maids and an "At Home" day and comfort? True to our tradition, I obtained a smug satisfaction from the adult way I took my failure.

IV

Of course, when I started out I had no intention of floriatating into pubs, but then, as I knew, a good many men whose whole lives were spent in designing almshouses, or that particular kind of morgue, the primary school, had no intention at the outset of pinning their existences down to almshouses or primary schools. They just drifted into the habit through the current of circumstances. That was how it happened to me.

Reanon was the cause of it all. Reanon was a brewer dealing with a large gesture in tied houses. He had plenty of money, and an almost gastric hunger for ex-

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pansion. And in that vision of expansion there were several glowing but indefinite spots of color he called ideals. Hall Milne had built Reanon's brewery, and several of his tied houses, and to Hall Milne he came when the glowing spots in his mind became too bright to be bearable.

Like many people with his complaint, he could only yearn, not articulate. He wanted "something." He sat in Hall Milne's room and talked in hyperbole—a tongue in which he was conspicuously at sea. He waved his hand to unfold glories. He spoke of what-d'y'-call-'em gable things, and snugness, and red-roofs, and little round tower you-knows, and those-er-beams-in-cement-outside . . . and all that. . . . He had no definite idea of what he did want. He had an unspecific emotion, a glowing desire for the "pub beautiful." He had bought an excellent site that was both attractive and of great commercial promise, and he thought that this was a chance for "doing things well."

A difficult man to deal with. Intangible visions are hard to satisfy. Hall Milne told him he knew exactly what he wanted and that his craving would be assuaged. And afterwards he said to Baddick,

"The man's potty. In the name of heaven, what is he driving at?"

"The inn idyllic," said Baddick, who had already had an outline of the case from his partner, and who was more than anxious to get back to the diaper ornament he was designing for a church restoration.

"Don't thank you for the obvious," snapped Hall Milne. "I know what his general symptoms are. But, dammit, what has he got his eye on? . . . No good giving me an Irish stew of architectural terms and saying 'Build me something beautiful out of that.' What precisely has he in his mind?"

"He doesn't know . . . nothing practical, sh'd think,"

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said Baddick between soft whistlings, as he bent over his board.

"I can't build a house out of a man's *feelings*," cried Hall Milne bitterly.

"Young Harbour's got a rustic bulge," threw Baddick. "Put young Harbour on to it." He did not look up.

Hall Milne thought for thirty seconds.

"There are moments when you have a bewildering common sense, Arthur," he said. And he came out and "put me on to it."

I think he was uneasy about the matter. Reanon was a very good client and it would be a calamity to lose him. Hall Milne was so much at sea in the business himself that he felt incapable of doing anything that would serve. The fact that I had a "rustic bulge"—it was in my early days, when I had yet to merge from my enthusiasm for cottages—seemed to him the only hope of the firm. And yet it was a hope he could not rely upon very much. He could not be sure of my ability. He was nervous about it. As much as the Midland character can, he fluttered about me, tried to stimulate me.

We went down to the site to survey together. It was an admirable situation, wooded, with a small lake, and ground for lawns. We looked at it from all angles. As we stared, Hall Milne said,

"Don't bother about accurate measurements. . . . Don't bother about bedrooms, an' butler's pantries, an' lavatories, and that sort of thing. Or staircases. Just *see* a house there. See something that fits."

"Yes," I said, "yes——" already feeling something, and knowing excitement.

"Chalet," said Hall Milne, "yes. Perhaps a chalet idea. Quaint . . . rustic . . . yes, p'raps a chalet."

"A chalet is a good idea . . . yes . . ." I said vaguely.

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Hall Milne looked at me sharply. And shut up. He snapped,

"You understand you do *what you like*."

He left me abruptly. He strode off with a clerk to his measuring. A strange fellow, apparently as hard and as impenetrable as the pottery of his birthplace, but he could read my mind from an inflection of the voice.

And I was excited. I was seeing something. I was seeing a glorified cottage—something that had grown out of my strange passion for cottages, sitting with exquisite appositeness on that site. The more I looked, the more complete it grew. I saw not a chalet—how wise Hall Milne had been to snatch that trite chalet idea away from me; if he had persisted I might have dragged it in—not a chalet at all, but a low, winged house with a gambrel roof and long dormers. A quaint house, a house not merely charming but novel. . . . I pulled out a block and roughed out my idea . . . and added to it, and simplified it . . . between the wings a veranda porch . . . with pillars, lawns and flower-beds coming right up to it . . . a pillared, tiled lobby in front of the dining room. . . . It all worked out lyrically.

When Hall Milne came up, I showed him my rough design. I showed it fearfully, but ready to be proud. Hall Milne poked his head at it. Took it from my hand and studied it. I waited for an explosion—his condemnation or praise.

"Want to do any more on it?" he asked. "No? Come along. We'll work out measurements."

We worked them out with rugged energy. We packed our instruments. . . . We went back to town by train. It was after office hours, and I went home, still wondering how deep was the despair into which I had plunged my "boss." Of the workings of his mind I had no inkling.

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The next morning I asked him what I had better do about the drawing. Should I get on with it? All he answered was,

"Why not?"

I got on with it, not too well, because I was still new and green, but Hall Milne himself helped me in an amazing manner. Give him but the faintest hint in architectural terms, and he took hold of it at once, and worked it out in a drawing that was firm, sure and beautiful. And he went very tenderly, for all his brusqueness, with my elevation, my drawing of the outside of the house, relying entirely upon me for the conception, only correcting detail when necessity demanded. But my plan. . . . He muttered, "Oh, Christ . . ." snatched it from me, and removed it to his own office, where, a day or two later he not merely showed me an entirely new drawing, but battered into me one of the most valuable lessons on internal arrangement and construction I have ever had. Yet even in his new plan I noticed that he had retained, where possible, those parts of my scheme which gave an air of quaintness and freshness.

It was only when Hall Milne brought Reanon into my room and said, "Here's the lad who begot the idea," that I realized my drawing had been a success.

Reanon, in fact, was effusive. He wrung my hand ardently,

"Really, quite a young fellow. I do congratulate you. Really a fresh and beautiful idea. A distinctive idea. Fits my conception—magnificently." (I saw Hall Milne's lips twitch slightly. I almost heard his sardonic voice saying, "And what was your blasted conception?") "And it strikes a note—a new note. I can bring to mind no other place, no other inn of the kind. . . . Unique. . . . You have broken away from the chalet . . . so utterly conventional the chalet. I could not have stood it. But

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that quaint roof, those—er—quaint windows (he meant the dormers). So new. Quite a stroke of genius.”

“Oh—an adaptation from the Dutch,” said Hall Milne, feeling that I was getting too much of it. He hustled the brewer out of the room.

And that was the beginning of my groove. We had pleased Reanon, we did more work for him. Other people saw the new style of inn and followed after, coming to us, of course, because it was felt that, having led the way, we were the only people who could give them authentic novelty. Pubs grew. Pubs came to us in a steady stream. We had a pub following. And as I had designed that distinctive pub, other distinctive pubs were handed over to me, and I became an expert: not merely an expert in outward design, but an expert in the internal economy of such places. From much practice I became an authority in the placing and design of bars, of beer-engines that serve bars, of billiard rooms and stresses for billiard rooms, of guests' bedrooms and bathrooms and the rooms for chambermaids, and of service water supplies on every floor, and the hundred and one details that differentiate licensed premises from, say, a basilica or a shooting box. And being such an authority I was deemed the one most fitted to deal with any sort of public house, even when they had no relationship to the pretty and rustic idea which had led me astray into this fell line of practice. We had many humdrum places to build, for the people who had found us useful for pretty inns came to us when they were building commonplace premises.

V

I might have broken away. I might have set up an office of my own, since I had always intended to do so. I did not. Why? Probably because the wisdom of our

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kind had taken hold of me. Because I was a man of the world, because I was wise in the spirit of my surroundings, because I knew on which side my bread was buttered, because to start on my own was speculative and I had got enough of our essential atmosphere in me to be not merely wary of risk, but contemptuous of those who were unbalanced enough to throw over something sure to take them. To cut myself off from Hall Milne and Baddick would have been to cut myself off from steady work, and a fairly regular income. It would mean beginning anew, finding clients for myself—and clients for architects are not easy things to find. True, I had a connection, among innkeepers and builders of inns, and some of those might follow me to my own office. I saw no advantage in that. If I started on my own, it would be to get away from inns and inn builders to something more auspicious . . . that meant no clients to begin with, unless I won an open competition. If I clung to my innkeepers, where was the advantage in changing? I would get something extra in fees, something above commissions Hall Milne and Baddick gave me, but then I would have the overhead expenses of an office, which Hall Milne and Baddick saved me . . . and not all, only a fraction of the inn builders could be expected to come to me.

And then I was very comfortable, things were jogging along steadily, the idea of change seemed to me needlessly upheaving, the thought of risk chilled me. I was safe as I was. I might not be doing great work, but I was doing quite well.

Yet I was young. Agnes in a determined moment, when she came with Bee to see me at my office and heard my slightly humorous contempt of the work I was doing, insisted on my youth,

"You're young, you can fight," she said. "Why remain here doing this sort of work, slowly murdering your finer

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taste? Why not start on your own, risk it? You're young, time does not matter to you now . . . a few years—what difference will they make if you get what you want in the end?"

I shrugged my shoulders. I affected a slight amusement. I couldn't very well tell Agnes that time mattered a good deal. That ideals may be very fine things, but that a solvency that would put me in a position to marry Barbara seemed to me a more practical attainment. A few years . . . Barbara was already coquetting too much with Curling, who was in a position to marry her at any moment. No good telling Agnes all that, so I said with an air of mellow wisdom,

"Oh, but a man has to exist, you know."

"I don't call doing work one despises existence," said Agnes. "It's slavery. It's a degradation."

"It's selling your soul and not gaining the whole world," said Bee with characteristic brutality—she knew the extent of my earnings.

I smiled with the ripe superiority of the philosopher. That effort in aloofness covered my inability to find a suitable retort.

"If one has an ideal. If one feels one has it in one to do something specially, then one ought to do it. One ought to throw everything aside, go all out to attain the ideal," insisted Agnes.

Dear old Maeterlinckianism, I thought. And I said,

"The high ideal is all very well, but supposing it doesn't work out? We all have wonderful ideas of what we'd like to do, but when we come to practical facts, put our fancies to the test . . . well . . . maybe we find out that we've only been daydreaming . . . with nothing material to go on."

"But have you put your—your dreams to the test?"

I knew what Agnes meant. She was clinging with burr-

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like tenacity to that romantic, young-boy vamping about cottages. I knew a twinge. Damn those cottages. What right had she to hold me to them when I had discarded them myself. No right. So when I answered her I ignored them and referred to something else . . . to my neoclassic wallow, in fact,

"As a matter of fact . . . yes. I have had a shot at the things I wanted to do."

"And——?"

"And the pubs had it," I finished, Byronically.

Agnes quite startled me then. She looked at me with a sudden warm vividness. She was sympathizing with me in my frustration. There was a new, quick look in her eyes, a tenderness, a pity, a contrition that made her beautiful in a rapturous and quite adorable fashion. It was as though a rich and generous nature had suddenly and unrestrainedly come out to me. . . . I was touched, I realized then that Agnes had a quality beyond other women. I looked at her with a surprised recognition of her, and Bee cut across that moment of exquisite intimacy.

"What's the good of trying to do things in an office like that . . ." she cried. "The very atmosphere . . . always a safe, solid, profitable pub to lure one away from the grind of doing real buildings. Get into an office of your own, Donald. Get away from all this."

I recovered my adult air. I became a mahatma,

"And find in the end I was only good for pubs after all . . . with less chance of doing them, less chance of earning money. Why give up a sure thing for . . . ?"

"Come along, Agnes," said Bee with decision. "Your old solicitor man will be waiting for you, your lunch hour is up. It's no good talking to Donald. He's become an Elder of the Suburban Rite. His only ideal is the ideal of the sure thing. . . . No good talking to him at all."

That talk did not disturb me. In fact, it amused

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me . . . these dreamers, how unpractical they were. I stayed on with Hall Milne. There was nothing brilliant about the office, but the money was steady . . . better than dreams and nothing anyhow.

And yet as time went on it was all disappointing. I seemed to be getting nowhere. There seemed to be no prospects.

My position with Hall Milne and Baddick was indeterminate and unsatisfactory. I had no definite standing in the office. Since I had qualified I had worked for the firm as an architect. I was above all the clerks in the outer office, yet not over them. I was not actually a member of the firm, I was merely attached to it, an employee who drew a salary and commission on the work he did. I had in the beginning a hope that I might become a junior partner, but as time went on that hope became fainter. Neither Hall Milne nor Baddick seemed to give the matter any thought, and they certainly did not make any advances. On the other hand, they showed no sign of thinking that I ought to start on my own. There was never a hint that they wanted or expected me to leave the office. I was a part of it, a floating fixture. They gave me plenty of work, they combined with me when I brought work to the firm. The indefinite state might continue, as far as they were concerned, as long as the office could support three architects . . . but as a state it would continue to be indefinite.

I remained in the air, so to speak, not a fixture in the firm, and yet fixed to it. A mere hireling of a rather superior sort, with very little chance of becoming anything else . . . though one of the principals might die, and I might be let into partnership under a new arrangement. There was always that. And my earnings reflected my position. They were steadyish but not imposing. They fluctuated between a minimum of two hundred fifty

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pounds and a maximum of four hundred pounds a year. And, as I saw it, they would always remain much the same while I hung on as I was. They were not bad earnings for a hireling, maybe, but they were not to be thought of as exalted. They were certainly not of the quality to provide the position and dignity of a "professional man" to whom people would look up.

VI

My circumstances were entirely melancholy when considered in connection with Barbara. It was because of them that my stock in the market of love had sunk so low. The peculiar ambiguity of my state was known to our friends on The Hill. By what subtle means they had been able with a piercing accuracy to assess my inconclusive position with Hall Milne and Baddick, my unpromising future, and my mediocre income I do not quite know. I suppose in the incessant business of looking into everybody's affairs but their own the gossips had picked up all the facts, fragment by fragment; an allusion from my mother, a slip from the careless tongue of Owen, a correction of an underestimate of my worth by my father . . . scores of tiny morsels of information collected and carried by those human ants to scores of tea-table conferences went to the making of that assessment and as an assessment it was pitilessly sound.

It was known that I graced a profession, but it was also known that I was not a substantial figure in it. . . . That my income was a very ordinary one. My prospects . . . a shrug.

The Majors reacted under the knowledge. One could not doubt that Mrs. Major had the most sensitive social instinct on The Hill. The antennæ of her intimacy shrank from me. No, she did not do anything dramatic

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or ridiculous. I was still a caller, still received in a friendly way, but there was a lower temperature, almost imperceptible, yet effectual. And there were difficulties in securing Barbara unalloyed. . . . Barbara, who was but a crystallization of the atmosphere about her, whose individuality was merely the echo of the combined tendencies of The Hill, drew away in the wash of her mother's subtle movement. My engagements with Barbara, the theater outings, the tennis games, and so on, became broken and disjointed. They weren't snapped short, she simply had something else to do—and she generally did it with Curling.

I was acutely miserable, but I saw what was happening. I did not blame Barbara or her mother, whose tactful hand was the force that was steering her. From out the very spirit of our circle within me, I understood. Mrs. Major had not ceased to like me, Barbara had not ceased to like me. All circumstances being equal, Mrs. Major would have preferred me to Curling, and certainly, I thought, Barbara would. But the circumstances were decidedly not equal. For Barbara "to be seen about too much" with me was to risk an entanglement that might be damaging to Mrs. Major's tradition for social perception.

So Barbara wasn't seen "about" too much with me . . . a little, a few crumbs of comfort tossed to soothe my misery, for, after all, one never knew, I might *do* something some time, but that was all. And these intimate adventures became rarer. Gradually I became chary of suggesting outings to Barbara . . . I grew soul-sick at hearing the inevitable reply,

"Oh . . . I'm afraid I'm booked on Saturday. . . . You see, Dick Curling has asked us all to go round and play clock-golf." Or it might be, "Well, not 'The Sunshine Girl' . . . Dicky has taken a box for that." (A box!

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All I had dared aspire to were upper circle, or, at the most, dress circle seats.) "We're going this day week. . . . No, really, I don't know that I'm keen on anything particular just at present. . . . Must think about it."

Perhaps she did. But she kept her thoughts to herself.

My intimacy with Barbara was narrowed down and down. I was being edged out. I hated it. I loathed the sight and the thought of Curling sitting in the place of honor I had once held . . . but I could not keep away. Foolishly, fatuously I had to go round to the Majors' house, to see her if I could. I could not tear myself away.

And I thought, too,

"She *can't* mean anything with a fellow like that . . . common brute like that, fat, vulgar, reeking of coal-selling. . . . She can't possibly stand him."

So I went round, swallowed my pride, and waited until the real monstrosity of Curling should dawn upon Barbara. I was sure that in her heart there was a contempt for the fellow. I was sure that she did recognize in her heart that I was made of superior clay. . . .

I could understand the attraction of Curling. He could, at a mere wave of his hand, supply all those glittering things that were our necessities in ambition. He stood for the supreme glamour of The Hill. His podgy sisters already enjoyed all those things which made up the dreams of the daughters of The Hill.

They had a "lovely" house, not merely a fine house, but a "lovely" house—even my architectural contempt for its dignity as a structure, my more than contempt for its internal decoration was swamped by my awe at its glitter, at its sheer monetary shine. And with the "lovely" house they had servants, an ecstatic number beyond the two or three of other homes. And they had a man servant, a butler, a creature of almost fabulous significance.

The feminine young of The Hill spoke of the Curling

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house in swooning voices. They could express disdain for the Curlings themselves, "people like *that* to have *such* a house," but of the house itself, there were no two opinions. It was a wonder place. I went there once myself, to a dance. Its impact was certainly powerful. All the shiny pieces of all the shiny schools of furniture seemed to be concentrated in it, and electric light shone down on all until the place flashed. . . . Crowds of furniture, crowds of electric light, crowds of waiters from Lyons', crowds of food . . . and everything, every one appearing to have a highly polished surface. In that concentrated blaze there was an absolute awe.

The house, the lavishness of the Curlings was an inspiration in bliss to The Hill. I remember one day after the dance we sat with the Majors in their garden, and we formulated ambitions. I was unaware of the current against me then, and it was I who fondly urged Barbara to give us her opinion of what constituted the ideally blissful state of life. What I expected her to say, I don't quite know . . . something about a pretty, distinguished home, a home with *flair*, a quiet but palpably responsible life. . . . And she began,

"A 'lovely' house. . . . Oh, yes, I want a lovely house. . . . Everything nice . . . from Maple's, perhaps. . . . And a lot of servants. . . . A maid for myself. . . . A motor car, a yellow one." I listened with consternation. Barbara was talking with the dreamy vision of a sibyl. And she was talking more than she had ever talked before. The vision of the Curlings' house had deprived her of all her reticences. It had intoxicated her. She was revealing her innermost soul.

As she mentioned the motor car, Curling, who was with us, looked sleek. He wriggled and said,

"Rather . . . a good Daimler, eh?"

"Yellow . . ." mused Barbara, to whom a Daimler

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meant nothing, "to take me to the theater. And back. No stuffy last trains, or trams. Always stalls at the theater. And ripping frocks . . . from *Jay's*. . . . And things from Peter Robinson's . . . ooo! think of a running account at Peter Robinson's. . . . And dinners at the Troc . . . with a band. . . . Balls with red carpet to the curb . . . and policemen keeping back the crowd. I'd like a ripping traveling bag, silver and blue enamel fittings. And tortoise-shell things, gold and tortoise-shell things on my dressing table. I'd go to Asprey's and buy huge quantities of things. I'd gorge myself at Asprey's." Asprey's was said with a sort of bated breath, a sort of chancel intonation. Asprey's was a holy word.

"Teas at the Criterion," said Barbara, she looked up. Her imagination was becoming diffuse under the glory of it all. She could no longer command the details of her dream. "I'd have heaps and heaps of things, an utterly gorgeous time."

I stared at Barbara dumfounded. I was crushed. I was deprived of power to comment. Curling was not. He cried with a thick joy,

"Of course . . . that's what every girl orter have. It's a girl's right. That's my opinion."

I glared at the fellow. What right had he to lead Barbara astray? He was debasing. But I saw the smile Barbara gave him, and I realized at once the danger of his unbridled income. I tried to pull myself together. I tried to obliterate that glittering nightmare with a more prudent, a more genteel vision of ambition. But Barbara was not paying attention. The tawdry flash of the dream had fused her and Curling together. She was listening eagerly to his mundane poetry. I heard him say in a low voice,

"Now my sisters, they say that it's absolutely no good going anywhere for decent frocks but to . . ."

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It was defeat. What could I put up against that fellow? He could, even then, give her most of the things her dream pictured. He could make her the crucial figure on The Hill. He could endow her with all those frocks, servants and period rooms which would exalt Mrs. Major into the seventh heaven of tea-table description. He could make her blaze, and Mrs. Major would shine enormously in that blaze. I had all the powers of suburban brightness against me.

And I had nothing to offer—an indeterminate position, a frustrated ambition, a mediocre income, that was all. Marriage to me would be a commonplace, our social position after marriage tame and inconspicuous. I was a mere villa husband, and semidetached at that. No, I might be a pleasant enough boy, but I was an inauspicious husband.

To this lower level I was falling when Bee plunged into her irresponsible engagement with Hugh. And it was that act which enabled the Majors to draw away in a more marked manner. My severance from Barbara became definite. Not only did I see her less, but the mere act of seeing her became something of a triumph over tremendous obstacles. . . . There were barriers between us, and unmistakably, but discreetly, the Majors made me aware of them.

In time I kept away. Even my infatuation was not strong enough to carry me through these zones of inarticulate hostility. And I kept away with something of a rage in my heart, a rage partly directed against Hugh and Bee, partly against Barbara. I wouldn't go near her. I'd be damned if I'd show my face there again. I'd cut her, all of them, right out of my life. I became altitudinous, remote, infernally unpleasant to live with.

It was a horrible, blank, aching period. I did nothing. I did not link up with another girl in defiance. I did not

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wallow in dissipation, or even work. I mooned. I walked long and gloomily. I did nothing with myself. . . . When I saw Barbara and Curling together, in his car with a sister, at tennis parties, anywhere, I was invincibly polite and aloof. And really the sight of them hurt me—not as much as I hoped it would, but a great deal. She was so slim, so exquisite. The curious, frail, stemlike grace of her beauty tore at me. More than before I seemed to be aware of her physical perfection. I felt a pang of loss. Some one else had that lovely thing that once I had regarded as my own. I felt the deprivation physically. The physical side of desire had not touched me before. . . . Now I felt it acutely.

I could not forget that Barbara had at times been kind. Even after she had begun to go about with Curling, she had given me abrupt and unexpected experiences of intimacy. They were little fond flashes which seemed to assure me that beneath all her actions, beneath her curious, snowy reserve her heart went out to me alone. Perhaps, some day, she would swing back to me . . . but as the days went on I felt against her a great anger. She had betrayed all that was fine in her for the sake of the bawdy glitter of the Curlings' money. She had swallowed all her disgust—and I had heard her express it often—for the fellow and his people for the sake of the things his money might buy. She accepted his presents, blazing bits of jewelry, blazing boxes of chocolates. . . . I saw them with hate; their glitter had hypnotized her.

It was loathly. I regarded her with scorn.

"All right," I used to mutter, as though taking away from her her last hope of salvation. "All right, go your own way then. Marry the swine. I've finished. I've nothing more to do with you. I wash my hands. . . ."

And then suddenly there came Bee's fame, and the change of front . . . and I was back at her side.

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VII

Mrs. Major's social instinct did it, that marvelous protean gift that never failed her, that was undaunted by even the most drastic change of face demanded of her. On Monday she had been expressing opinions of Bee and Hugh with a more than personal bitterness in her disgust. On Tuesday Mr. Major had mentioned the photograph of Bee he had seen in the *Sketch* at his barber's. On Wednesday Mrs. Major had both bought the *Sketch* and made her call on my mother.

I heard of the reunion, not with incredulity and contempt, but with relief. Barbara had been with her mother. Barbara had asked what had become of me. Mrs. Major had supported Barbara's demand with a desiccated simper, "Oh, Donald—he's quite deserted *us*." I wasn't there, but my mother told me. I could picture all that had happened. And I did not say,

"What crawling hypocrites they are. Donald deserted *us*—my hat, what a lying remark." I simply felt that the burden of the whole world had been lifted from my shoulders. I forgot my anger. I forgot I had washed my hands of Barbara. I forgot the enormous insincerity of these people . . . I only remembered Barbara, her slim, aloof exquisiteness, and I crawled back. I did not grovel, there was no need, I think we were all incapable of such pronounced emotions as groveling or real anger, I simply went back. I suppose we were all so insincere that one insincerity more or less did not matter. Anyhow, I overlooked everything and called at the house in the most ordinary way, and was received in the most ordinary way.

And because I had become one with the rest of The Hill, because I had sleeked myself in its atmosphere I almost immediately forgot that anything untoward had happened. I had so cultivated the sham outlook of merely

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seeing the things that made life comfortable that I at once adopted an unawareness of the questionable side of Bee's and Hugh's marriage. From my manner, from our manner they had done nothing except that which was romantic and notable. With the rest of The Hill I talked as though I had known from the beginning that Bee and Hugh had been heroes in our drama, and that we had every right to share in the glory that now surrounded their names.

I was right in the forefront with Barbara again, her accepted partner at tennis, going to theaters with her, being, by natural right, her pair at the significant supper number of dances, kissing her with snatches and secrecy in places that were dark but yet on the fringes of convention.

I won't say that luck did not play a part in all this. Even the celebrity of my sister could not itself have entirely vanquished the *lovely* house, the motor car and the income of Curling. It was Curling himself who had played into the lap of my luck, Curling at last had shown the uncouthness that came (apparently) of coal dust in the blood. I never quite knew what he did. I rather fancy he had become too confident. He had, in the surety of his possessions and position, indulged in attitudes condescending and proprietorial. There had been weeks when vulgarity was allowed to escape from its leash, displays of overbearing "commonness" in theaters and restaurants and at dances. . . . He had made a scene with a waiter when giving a dinner to Barbara and a sister, at a West End hotel they considered holy. And he had got drunk. . . . Really not actually drunk, not a good sterling incapability, but lively . . . and unfortunately other people of The Hill had become aware of it. That was the thing that made it criminal.

So Curling had gone into the shade. No, he had not been dismissed; he was still a caller, he was still received

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in a friendly way, but there was a lower temperature, almost imperceptible, yet effectual. . . . And when he asked Barbara to go out with him, she would reply,

"Oh . . . I'm afraid I'm booked on Saturday. . . . You see, Donald Harbour has asked me to go to the White City . . ." and so on. He was not dropped. One never quite knew what might happen, and it was well to keep in with him, to be on the safe side. So he was seen about the Majors' house, though it was I who occupied the coveted position by Barbara's side he had so lately filled.

And then, on the charm of Bee's worldly eminence, on top of Curling's backward slide I made a sudden spurt in my profession. I flowered into a contract for building picture palaces. I was suddenly busy on planning those stucco façades which were springing up in main streets, giving a zest of bright and rococo modernity to districts previously bleak and vitiated. I had become, at a bound, as it were, a force in a new world movement. I was well in the van of the up-to-date. That gave me a glamour . . . I was on a par with Lipton, and the Lyons' Corner House and the rest of the pioneers of the twentieth century.

And the fact that I was well in with this world movement was important. I was designing not one, not a casual cinema theater, but a series of them. A big combine had placed a contract with us, and we were planning halls to be erected in every big city in the United Kingdom. There was very little in it from an architectural or financial point of view. The theaters themselves were as flimsy and as cheap as building costs and local regulations could make them, and even the façades, the only part of them that called for any architectural ingenuity, were of a flashy skin-deep meretriciousness. . . . Yet it was modern, it was in the public eye, it gave me a definite notability.

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Moreover, the fact that I owed this long contract to Hugh seemed to hold out a promise of my being trailed aloft in the heavens at the tail of my brother-in-law. I don't think it meant that at all. The managing director of the combine happened to be a friend of Hugh's. And Hugh, with that strange shrewdness which seemed to us to clash with his vocation as a musician, had seen the future of the cinema, and had put some of his money into his friend's company. It was this that let me in. When the managing director insisted that his theaters should have a quality, a prettiness, a distinctiveness about their appearance, Hugh immediately recalled my design for Reanon's "Pub Beautiful." He mentioned that I had a peculiar capacity for doing just the thing wanted. The managing director, without committing himself, put me to the test.

I saw in those tawdry theaters my chance of salvation. I worked hard on them. I tried to recapture the first ecstatic moment of just design, but it was not easy. It did not come spontaneously. I labored with a definite anxiety over the drawings. I missed the thrill, the complete run-away that had been mine when I designed Reanon's "idyllic inn," when I was still full of my cottage ideas. Yet I accomplished a drawing that was satisfactory. The man took it, though not with the quickening enthusiasm of Reanon. When I showed him the sketch, he looked and mused and said,

"Yes, I suppose that's as good as we can expect, I suppose the nature of these buildings. . . ."

I jumped at that point. I agreed with him that the very nature of the buildings was a thing that handicapped. The rapidity with which they must be run up, their flimsiness, their peculiar requirements robbed them of their chance of being really pretty. I made the most of this, I showed that I was an artist frustrated in his ideal by

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circumstances he could not control. And the man agreed with me. Presently he admitted that I had made a rattling good job of it . . . and all the time I was conscious that I had not. Under all my talk I felt that I had failed in a class of work in which I should have succeeded, in which, at one time, I would have scored a peculiar and distinctive success. But I dismissed that vague, troubled disappointment. My man-of-the-worldness enabled me to triumph over it. I told myself that we all had such qualms, we all felt that in our youth we had been capable of better things . . . memories of one's juvenile fire, of what one could have done were misleading. Looking back, one saw things through a rosy mist. I convinced myself, that, really, I had made a rattling good job of it, and went on with my contract. I improved a good deal as I became more accustomed to the work, as I lost my anxiety. But now, I am certainly not proud of any one of those theaters, whose stucco is already beginning to decay under the weathering of years and the war-time absence of repairing.

VIII

All these combined to bring me into favor with the Majors and with Barbara. My income took a slight leap upward, and Hall Milne, if not Baddick, woke up to me as a worker in a new field, and, though they did not make any move yet towards admitting me to partnership, they spoke of me in accents of pride and promise, and The Hill heard of it, and glowed upon me.

I was again in that blissful condition when Barbara was instinctively paired off with me on public occasions. We were still not in love with each other, as The Hill knew love. The automatic budding of our passion could not come until my position was assured, until I became a

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partner. But there it was, we were going about together, taking chaperoned outings together, taking sides together in our various games. I again knew rapture, I again knew a comfortable glowing happiness. Especially when we were together, particularly when we were doing active things together did I know this.

For there was, after all, a slight change. It was a change which I can best describe by saying that I noticed our silences. Barbara was exquisite, I always thrilled when I came into her presence, saw the quick little toss of the chin that revealed her throat, felt the drawling pressure of her long, narrow hand, saw the reticent play of her half-smile on the quick curves of her lips. I loved watching her, her scarcely budded slimness, her vivid angularity, the coltish grace of her movements. There was a poignance in mere proximity to her.

And yet I was painfully conscious of the blank silences that happened so frequently between us when we were alone.

There had always been silences, but only now I noticed them. They seemed to be intolerable, even dangerous. I saw them as periods in which she was given an unpleasantly close and keen opportunity of studying me. "What is she thinking about?" I wondered. "What is wrong with me that keeps her quiet?" I used to rack my brains for topics to plug this hole. I used to labor with sweat on my lips to keep the ball rolling. . . . "Oh, Lord, silence again," I used to groan inwardly. "Hasn't she anything to say? Can't she talk about something? Why does she leave it all to me?" I felt she was bored, but perhaps that arose out of my own boredom. We seemed to have nothing to discuss, nothing in common to call for an interplay of thoughts and comment. We used to moon through hours of complete blankness towards each other. We had done that before the Curling estrangement, but now it got on

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my nerves, and the incessant effort to rectify it got on my nerves.

When we were doing something active, it was all right. We stopped talking; our play in tennis, our dancing together, our seeing things together saved us the necessity of talk. At these times we flung each other comments, or "joshed" each other, and smiled and laughed at each other with the gayety of our interest in the things we were doing. These were our really jolly times. . . . At times, in a game, a touch on the hand, a squeeze of the arm, a little romping to cover up the fact that we wanted to catch hold of, to handle each other, thrilled us ineffably. . . . We both did it, as we crossed over in tennis, as we did garden feats, and the effect was to bring ecstasy. . . . If only we could always be doing something.

And there was a change, not slight, very much more definite, in fact, when I was away from her. I was too complaisant away from her. She did not live with me in her absence as she had done. My days now were no longer vague, irritated spells of waiting for the tram which, somewhere about five or five thirty, would take me back to The Hill and Barbara. I forgot about the tram, I sometimes forgot it was five or five thirty, and remembered only with a start at about six or later that I was expected to go round and play a set that evening, and that devotion to my drawing-board had made that set an improbability.

And I no longer looked in stationers' shops for picture postcards, or remembered the exact locality of the nearest Fuller's.

And I did not go dreaming along Oxford Street to where the windows of Waring and Gillow added a temptation to marriage. . . . My days had become divorced from Barbara, she scarcely tinged them. It was only when I saw her again, came in contact with her that

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I fused and flashed to love. Only then did I see she was entirely adorable and that I must find some opportunity to kiss her. I wanted to kiss her more and more. Kissing was a necessity now. Kissing, I suppose, made up for so much.

I knew I was in love with her. It did not seem to me that my lack of fealty during the day had any bearing on the matter. In fact, I was sure it had not. . . . We men were like that. I saw the same thing happening all round me. Men of affairs had their lives divided into compartments. There was our home life, our life of sociability, serenity and affection on The Hill from about six or seven in the evening until about eight next morning. There was an entirely disconnected life, the life of intense concern and occupation of the hours between in The City. These things were separate, there was a sharp line dividing these lives.

I had grown steadily into my appreciation of this. As one didn't talk "shop" at home, it wasn't done, it bored our womenfolk—so one did not talk or think of home and womenfolk in The City. One balanced the other. The one, perhaps, arose out of the other. The way The Hill set its face against talking business in home hours was no doubt responsible for the way we ignored The Hill in business hours. . . . Anyhow, it seemed to me that I was merely acting as any ripe, well-regulated male of The Hill would act. I did not love Barbara the less by not thinking of her. For, by Jove, I loved her tremendously. Wasn't I going to marry her when I could? Did I ever look at any other girl?

Well, not any other girl during those social hours on The Hill. In The City—well, it was quite different in The City. Quite different, though the girl I looked at there was a resident on The Hill. Was Agnes Gillow in fact.

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IX

I had come across Agnes Gillow—in her commercial existence, that is—in a Slater's Restaurant. She was working with a solicitor, who had offices in Lincoln's Inn, quite near my office, but I had never found out where—that was the sort of thing we would not do. But to meet her casually in a restaurant was different. She was sitting at a table by herself, and I saw her, and sat with her. And I found that she, like myself, had an adventurous taste in eating places, and only used this Slater's occasionally—that was why I had not seen her there before.

The reason underlying our failure to meet, the fact that we were always searching for new restaurants, gave us an exciting topic at once. We swopped restaurants. We skated over the obvious ones, the Cheshire Cheese, the Press Restaurant, Simpson's and notorieties of that kind. And we asked each other had we been to the little place in Clifford's Inn, or the small, clean milkshop in Shoe Lane, called George's, I think, where, after hours, one could get the best porridge and scones and what not else to stave off a hunger begot of overtime work, and see sub-editors at their ease. We knew both. We both knew other places east and west of the Bar. The small, steep place by The Cock, as well as The Cock itself, the quite nice place . . . What was its name? . . . opposite the Savoy, well, nearly opposite, that seemed to exist in a single small room on the first floor . . . though, of course, it had a bar. We tried to cap each other, but we had apparently been to all the known places until Agnes asked me if I had tried the Vegetarian place, the Food Reform in Furnival Street, off Holborn? I had tried a place in Holborn, but not that particular one.

"Well, you must come along. I'll take you. You'll see

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Keir Hardie there; he has rooms in Fetter Lane. And the food's strange but excellent. A nice place, really."

I fixed up a lunch with her. We went. We didn't see Keir Hardie that day, but we saw him once as we walked in Holborn on our way to a place of really good cooking near Wallis'. Yes, we went to other places together. We got into the habit of lunching together at least once a week. They were usually lunches of exploration. But they were tremendous fun, and we seemed to have an awful lot to say to each other. And it was about our work, too. The surroundings, the circumstances permitted that. In fact, I think they insisted on it. It made it plain to us, to me, that this was all very much apart from The Hill. That it was in another compartment and in no way affected my life on The Hill. It made no difference at all to my feelings for Barbara. None at all. I met Agnes as a business acquaintance, in the sphere of business. . . . But no, frankly, I did not even formulate that thought. I simply met Agnes without thinking anything about her, or about Barbara in connection with her. I was firmly and fervently in love with Barbara. . . . Yes, by this time I had got into the habit of mentioning this undoubted fact often and gravely to myself (you can gather from that the state of my heart, if you like). And being in love with Barbara, well, there was no question of any one else.

But the luncheons were immensely attractive and absorbing. We did talk enormously. I learned a whole heap about lawyers, and Agnes' work with lawyers, and I told her all about my architecture, its ardors, its difficulties, its drawbacks. Agnes was so understanding. She was able to grasp things, to see the inside of one's troubles. . . . She knew the thrill, the romance, the exciting quality of business, of doing things. . . . And she never referred to those cottages.

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There were other subjects, too, heaps of them. We turned over the ant-heap of life. We talked of unemployment, and strikes, social legislation, and theaters, and books and bits of London we had found out with great acumen, the talk of Rebellion in Ulster. . . . I don't know what we didn't talk about. And it was all unrestrained and bubbling. That is, nearly always—we knew constraints. They usually arose when we forgot that the two compartments of our life were distinct and separate. Only when we dragged The Hill into The City did things go wrong. . . . I remember I caused a hot and intolerable silence one day by blurting out in a moment of sheer pleasure,

“Lord, Agnes, who'd have thought you were like this? I never dreamed you had all this in you.”

And Agnes had answered with a flash,

“Perhaps you didn't look.” And there was something at once tremulous and proud and hurt in her; and she blushed slowly, looking steadily at me, as though she tried to hold her head high above that red, telltale tide. And I felt that I had been a thorough ass. Had put my foot in it. . . . We finished the meal amid a punctuation of wretched monosyllables, and we both went away without naming another day for meeting. I carried away with me a picture of her sitting there trying to fight down that blush, and looking soft and proud and very, very beautiful . . . and it was a picture I couldn't get out of my head for weeks.

Another time she stashed me with her own bluntness. We had met on a social footing on The Hill several times in the previous few days. There had been a rash of parties and dances, and we had come into contact over a series of evenings before our luncheon day. And I had behaved during those functions as the unmarried male of The Hill did behave, and there had been blanks and per-

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plexities between us. I thought that she quite failed to understand the difference in the two kinds of meetings. And Agnes . . .

At the lunch, after the first plunge into talk, which came entirely from me, she cut right in with,

"Why don't you always behave rationally? You can talk sensibly now. . . . Well, why not always?"

I think she was really perplexed, though possibly she was a little hurt—I don't pretend for a minute that she was ever anything but a woman. As she spoke she faced me with a wonder and indignation in her eyes. She was examining me, trying to understand me, and her look as much as her words flicked me on the raw.

"What on earth do you mean by that?" I asked distantly, knowing exactly what she meant.

"Why, at those dances, the way you behaved and talked. As though you hadn't a particle of brain, or an idea in your head. While here . . ."

"Oh, at the dances," I said, for being a man I could not leave things alone. "At dances and things one has to adopt a certain manner. . . ."

"Does one?" she said. "Why?"

"Oh, it's the thing . . . everybody rather fools about."

"It's a beastly manner. Inane. Why do you do it, Donald?"

"Everybody does it," I answered loftily.

"What a standard!" she scoffed. "Why do you let yourself be drawn into it? Why don't you break away—like Bee?"

I shrugged my shoulders. I couldn't argue with her. If she couldn't see . . . I changed the subject and we talked of other matters. But indifferently, with a certain air of strain. And I think from those two happenings we did become more guarded with each other. Our spontaneity had gone. We liked lunching with each other . . .

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but we were becoming too much aware of each other. We became wary.

And then, when Agnes brought up architecture at a tennis party, began to talk of it as though she knew something about it, showed such an uncanny intimacy with certain of its aspects, especially those aspects that concerned my work, Barbara, who was there, listened with a stiffening body, and an occasional quick glance. I saw that the intimacy was impinging too far on the home life, that it was becoming dangerous, that Agnes was crossing the line. . . .

When Barbara mentioned later that some girls didn't mind what they did in order to make up to a man, *that they pretended* to know things and it was mere slyness on their part, I knew that Barbara had put two and two together and was as jealous as she knew how to be jealous.

And when even later she asked ingenuously if I ever came across Agnes in The City, since she understood that her office could not be far from mine, I said, loftily,

"Yes, I do come across her occasionally. Not often, though. When I'm busy, as busy as I am now and will be for some time, I very rarely have a chance of seeing her. . . ."

And after that I saw to it that I rarely had a chance of seeing her. The lunches became infrequent and gradually ceased. I settled down more determinedly into my man-of-the-world groove. I worked and I saw Barbara, and tried to bridge those growing and blank silences with Barbara. . . .

But I missed those lunches with a curious, unforgettable sense of loss.

CHAPTER V

I

THE advent of the war irritated and annoyed me.

Its coming was an acute nuisance. Its arrival, and the very abruptness of its arrival, was tiresome. It disturbed people whose very instincts led them to hate disturbance more than anything else on earth. It upset the steady routine of our lives in a way we must resent if we were true to ourselves. Frankly I think many of us were extraordinarily vexed that Mr. Asquith had allowed Great Britain to be incommoded in this bothersome business. There was a hearty indignation against, not Germany, but the Kaiser at not having known better than to mix us up in all this. The Kaiser had made life extremely disquieting for us, and so he must be taught a lesson. Out of this atmosphere I think arose the inexplicable optimism of the "all over by Christmas" opinion. It was simply unthinkable to us that the regular tenor of our lives could be interrupted for longer than that.

My own attitude towards this tremendous thing was that it was rather inconsequent. I did not say this; I spoke as sternly as anybody else about the Kaiser and von Kluck to Barbara or any woman who needed wisdom from the male, but in actual fact that was the way I acted. I went about looking down upon, scarcely touched by, the antics of other people. In some way I did not seem to be concerned in it all. It was something that other people did. I was busy and preoccupied and had not time for Armageddon.

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No, I was not shirking; I simply was not in it. I saw appeals for men. I read leading articles telling of the tremendous nature of the struggle now before the nation. I noted that politicians of all grades were urging everybody to take a vital share in the gigantic task of the war. But I was not touched. I did not apply these things to myself. These things were simply not meant for me. I went my way, followed my routine as best I could with an entire absence of personal feeling. . . . I even watched incredibly hot and mortally uncomfortable young men marching in the streets, or drilling in their own clothes in open spaces, with an aloof yet friendly smile. "Damn fine chaps," I murmured to myself. But it did not occur to me that I should be one of those damn fine chaps. I suppose I had become incapable of doing anything outside the rut; that must be the explanation. I had given up thinking and working out things by myself. I had become so saturated with the "leave things alone" spirit of The Hill that I was incapable of initiative. Everything—government, education, poor law administration, public service—everything except the business of "getting on" we left to other people; leaving things to others had become a habit, and fighting was one of the things so left.

It was not from this aspect that I looked upon the war as a nuisance. It was that because it was going to mess up things. It wouldn't mess them up as far as Barbara was concerned—apart from its effect on my business—for our intimacy was proceeding at a level-footed pace. It might even benefit me, bridge over those blank moments which were growing intolerable, for already I had held her attention in expounding the military situation which, until I talked of it, she had seemed wholly unable to grasp. . . . I worked it out on a *Daily Telegraph* map, and she said, with admiration,

"Now I see. I couldn't make out how the Belgians were

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driving the Germans back from Antwerp when the fighting was all near Paris. It is rather dangerous for the Germans, isn't it?"

As far as Barbara was concerned the war did not interfere much—though I had a vague, uneasy feeling that presently this thing that knew no limits or decencies might. It was in my work that it would mess things up.

And really, with regard to my work, I was not neutral, I was definitely angry with the war. It seemed to me damnable that it should butt in there. We were quite busy. There was another contract for cinemas, and I had a riverside inn on my hands. We were doing well, and the war interrupted. I hated the war for interrupting. It seemed to me that it was encroaching beyond its rightful sphere, it was getting itself mixed up with matters that were really important. I know all this sounds a little far-fetched, but it only does so because I have put into words, and compressed into a paragraph, my actual attitude as translated by my actions covering a period of many weeks. Truly I should have been horrified if anybody had told me in so many words that this was the standpoint I was adopting, and I should have pointed to my patriotic and fiery utterances regarding the war in refutation. All the same, in actual practice I was more concerned with my work than the war. It was more real to me. It was the thing that mattered most and the resentment I showed at the difficulties the war placed in the way of my work was a much warmer resentment than for the difficulties the German armies placed in the way of our complete and speedy victory. My work stood for the safe and steady probity of The Hill; if you interfered with that, where was a man? This war was something rather melodramatic and disturbing outside my serene atmosphere.

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II

The war began to butt in at once. When we went back to the office on that Tuesday in August, Hall Milne had already decided we must shut down for a week—anyhow. The shock of that was quite brutal. I had realized that strange things were happening in the troubled world outside our radius, that some businesses must be interfered with; that we should be affected seemed monstrous. But there was nothing else to do. All building operations had come to a standstill, not merely because of the paralysis that had smitten the industries of the country, but because of many minor reasons. The military had taken over the railways and building material was hard to obtain; the military had commandeered in a large-handed manner horses and motor lorries, and even local building material could not be transported. Also the race of workingmen, bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters and the like seemed to have had, in their youth, a strange passion for soldiering; the number of reservists among them was abnormal. Already over the telephone Hall Milne had heard of men being recalled to the ranks in wholesale fashion.

We broke up after a worried council of war and went home wondering what would become of us all. We had little hope in Hall Milne's would-be optimistic assertion that he would call on friends he had in the War Office and the Admiralty and find out if there was anything doing. I spent those days in pleasurable garden athletics with Barbara, alternated with gloom at home.

My father took a distraught viewpoint. It seemed to him that the British Empire could not hold together now that we had quarreled with such excellent business men as the Germans. Our reliance upon their acumen and output seemed, after listening to his taut, assertive opinions, to be the one thing that had bound our com-

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merce together. There were so many things we couldn't do at all—and the Germans could do supremely well, *and* at the lowest possible price. German manufactory had been the factor that had enabled us to hold up our heads in spite of the high wages of the British workingman. And then, too, my father had an instinctive feeling that it was unnatural to fight Germany, it was even more than that to be in alliance with France in a fight against Germany. Germany, he would suggest, was more akin to us. The Germans were more of ourselves. . . . My father was one of many solid people who secretly distrusted France, that home of Paris and light, frivolous, glitteringly immoral people.

On Thursday I had a telegram from Hall Milne, and returned to the office on Friday. The war was not altogether cataclysmic, it seemed. He had had promising interviews with his friends in the War Office and Admiralty, and he had also got in touch with firms who had switched off from industrial work onto armaments; their factories would have to be overhauled. Meanwhile one of my half-built cinemas in a provincial town had been snatched at by the military. They were arranging for labor, and I was to get to work at once to alter the plans so that the hall could be changed into a depot.

That was the beginning of our reawakening. Quite soon we were busier than before the outbreak of war. Hall Milne had pulled wires to great purpose. From both the War Office and the Admiralty came orders to plan hutment sites, to scheme out temporary buildings, to adapt existing buildings to the requirements of naval and military depots, administration quarters and so on, and a little later we were working under pressure, designing the saw-tooth factories that were springing up everywhere to meet the increasing demands of munition-making. At the same time we were adapting older factories, the

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structure of which had to be strengthened to take the stress and weight of the heavier machinery used in tool-making and the production of shells. Soon we were so fully occupied that Hall Milne brought in another architect, Merle, a man of about fifty who had had to close down his office for the "duration" through lack of work. He was a pleasant, steady fellow, without Hall Milne's drive and capacity, without mine, either, I thought. Though he shared my room I did not resent his coming; there was plenty of work for him, and for his head clerk, who had also joined us.

III

Though I was busy enough, and had fallen back into my old sleek, self-contained groove in the atmosphere of The Hill, the war refused to leave me alone. It still butted in.

Its first marked intrusion on our discreet atmosphere was when it caught hold of Owen. Owen had been in a state of fermenting misery since August Bank Holiday. He brought a movement of uneasiness into the house—when he wasn't rushing about on his large and snapping motor cycle. He was entirely restless, and he *would* talk about recruiting. He made himself a nuisance. I remember him bursting out as we sat in the den,

"Crowds, tremendous mobs at Scotland Yard. . . . Everybody seems to be going . . . every sort of man. I saw them to-day, the queerest jumble. I suppose it does mean *everybody* ought to go."

I smiled in a superior way; fancy Owen worrying himself about that? But my mother, hearing a personal note in Owen's tone, said with a placidity that was infinitely calming,

"It's early days yet. People ought to wait to see how

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things turn out. I don't think it at all wise to rush at these things."

We never rushed at anything; it wasn't our habit. To wait until we saw how things turned out, what other people about us did, that was our enduring policy.

But although my mother's calmness was such as to suffocate any germ for enlistment that had lodged in my brother's mind, she wisely did not leave matters at that. I think she must have talked to my father. Anyhow the next night, at dinner, my father exuded dogma concerning recruiting. Recruiting was going so well as to be ill, was the trend of his *ex cathedra* assertion. He had heard these truths on all sides. More recruits than the authorities could cope with. Recruits were being turned away on most trivial pretexts. The military were getting far more than they required. They hadn't rifles or uniforms or instructors for a tithe of what had already come in. And accommodation and feeding—Jorold, in The City, had given him an unpleasant account of what his son had to put up with. Lowndes, who had two sons in already, said that the places in which the men slept, patriotic young men of really good families, too, and the sort of food they got when they got any at all, was a scandal. . . . Really the state of the recruiting was verging on public danger. Very fine, very splendid: nobody could say old England was on the decline. But there it all was. . . . Until we knew where we were, until we knew if all these men would really be wanted, it would be well to go slow. If anybody asked him for advice, he'd say quite honestly, wait until one saw how things were panning out. No good throwing up jobs, to find that in the end you weren't wanted. It was early days yet.

This wasn't directed at Owen; it was directed at the world in general. It was the allusive, indefinite, evasive sort of speech one would expect from my father, that was

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so proper to our atmosphere. It attacked no one and nothing, but Owen might feel its logical force. It was a characteristic response of my parents to the pressure of Owen's vague uneasiness. It was meant to throw cold water on Owen.

And Owen was in the army within the week.

One evening he came home quite shamefaced and told us that he had joined up. It was characteristic of my mother that she treated my brother as one who was physically incapable of performing the simple action of enlistment; Owen had misled himself into thinking he had joined up. When my mother greeted my father with, "Owen says he has enlisted," as though she knew there was really no truth in the matter, my father turned away from the hall-stand with his hat only half hung up, as it were, glared at my brother and said, "Nonsense! Nonsense!"

There was then a sort of cross-examination, a hostile cross-examination which strove to prove that there was a flaw somewhere, and that Owen, fortunately, had not brought off the thing he thought he had. In the end, in sheer self-defense, Owen said,

"I'm allowed forty-eight hours' leave, though I may be wired for. I report the day after to-morrow, but the sergeant said that I'd probably get another leave as they hadn't even a hint where they were going to put anybody. He also advised me to buy my khaki myself if I was anxious to get to the Front—the Lord knows when there will be an issue."

"I think you had better wait until you get your *right* uniform, so there won't be a mistake," said my mother, suddenly capitulating to the fact of Owen's enlistment in the hope that this temporization held out.

"Oh . . . the sergeant told me a good place to get it. I went there on my way home," said Owen.

"But—you don't really want to go to the Front,"

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gasped my mother. Then quite suddenly the shame and the misery went from my brother's face, there was a sudden keenness, a happiness which I hadn't seen for years.

"But I do," he said. "It'll be doing things. I want to do things—now."

From the way he said *now* I knew he meant *at last*. He was thinking of his frustrated hopes in the athletic life. In him the war inflicted the first defeat on the low-ceiling atmosphere.

Owen's impulse to serve had been with him from the first moment of war. It had been struggling against our "leave well alone" policy from the beginning. Men in his insurance office had joined up, and that had helped him. When he had heard of an automobile organization that was calling for young men with motor cycles, since the need of dispatch-riders was acute, he felt it to be an appeal directed particularly at him.

He obtained his khaki, and in a queerly short time was gone. I only seemed to see him once or twice. He was almost inhumanly happy, a changed man. He seemed at last to have got into the sort of life he cared for most.

My parents took his going with a sort of bewildered astonishment at first; they could not understand how he had done it. Then when he went away they suddenly and poignantly realized that he was their younger son, and their quiet tragedy was something that astonished me. But all the time they never believed Owen would be hurt. Other people might be wounded, but he was "different"; our attitude of evasion was an immense support to them in this matter anyhow.

IV

I treated Owen's enlistment as a redoubtable topic in my talks with Barbara. We made rather more of it than

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it warranted, because it most blessedly filled out our now inevitable silences. Barbara, almost animated, taking an almost personal pleasure in the letters we received from Owen, whose time at the Front seemed a perfectly priceless one, was adorable. I loved her actively, I kissed her more. The only undercurrent to my pleasure was that Barbara's interest in my brother seemed strangely pointed. She had always, previously, regarded him as a little bit rough. Now she seemed to find a peculiar attraction in him. At a little party we gave before he went away she had shown a warmth for him, and a liking for his neighborhood which would have disturbed me—only, of course, Owen was my brother. She had passed her hand down his khaki arm with an almost lingering caress, as she stood admiring his uniform, an action of astonishing freedom for her. And when he had gone she asked for his photo in uniform, and later, when even the contents of his letters seemed to leave her unsatisfied, she got the cryptogrammic address to which we sent letters. . . . I felt it was unworthy of me, but beneath my feeling for her I did experience an unease at this definite interest.

But all that, my uncomfortable feeling, her own interest in Owen, abruptly vanished when Curling appeared on The Hill in uniform.

Curling had been threatening us with his commission for weeks. He told us in a high voice and often that he had sent in his papers, and that as he had been at one time in the H.A.C., a sergeant in the H.A.C., and had been to a fairly resonant Public School he expected to be gazetted any day. We considered this merely brag. We didn't believe the authorities would look at him. More, we felt that he knew this, and that his talk about a commission was merely something to cover up the fact that he had not enlisted.

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We were all getting a little bit touchy about recruiting by this time.

Quite suddenly then the miracle happened. Curling appeared among us in the Sam Browne and the one "pip" of subaltern. He was an officer; what is more, he had the luck to be drafted to a new regiment that—though it wasn't so advanced in uniform as Curling—was going through its training no farther away than Brockwell Park. Curling had had extraordinary luck; not only had his papers gone through, but he was allowed to blossom in his uniform at the place where its splendors would be appreciated most.

At once Barbara went to his side as though drawn by a magnet.

Once again my visits to the Majors' house became visits of frustration. Again I went back to that miserable phase when my going there found Barbara out with Curling, when my suggestions for outings were met with,

"No, I'm afraid I can't manage Wednesday, Donald. You see, Dick wants us to go with him to 'The Outcast' that night." Or it might be, "If Dick can get leave he wants to motor us down to Ightham on Saturday, so you see I can't promise you."

Curling with his uniform had again flashed into supremacy. But now there were differences. Barbara's swing away from me was curiously abrupt. There was nothing gradual in the way in which she let me down in order to take up with my rival. On his first visit to her house in uniform she was, in the vulgar term, all over him.

There was a touch of shamelessness in that abrupt surrender. Her delicate and cold exquisiteness took on at once a glow of invocation, she looked at him with eyes wide and fascinated, her very body seemed to lean towards him as though drawn by the irresistible force of his smart

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tunic. She was warmer to him than she had ever been before, than she had ever been to any one. Even the strange quickening she had showed at the sight of Owen in uniform was exceeded. Indeed she forgot all about Owen, for he wrote me later that although Barbara had sent him a jolly little letter, and he had answered it saying how much news from any one at home was valued, she had not responded. The subaltern's cloth was more hypnotic than the private's.

But the greatest difference of all I felt in myself. I didn't like her neglect of me, and at the same time I did not mind. Now and then when I thought of her, so slim, so delicate, so enigmatic, so flowerlike; when I saw her rushing about in Curling's car with other determinedly hearty young officers; or when I saw her taking part in the exuberant dances that these avid young fellows seemed to get up at the mere presence of a gramophone or a piano—when I saw her thus I knew a pang. I could not bear losing that pliant and perfect thing. And yet at most times she did not occur to me. It was not merely that I was immensely busy at the office, working late and hard with my mind occupied all the time, but even when I was idle at home the knowledge that she was probably occupied with Curling and his khaki clan occurred to me too readily as an excuse for remaining at home and not going round to the Majors. Alongside that pang of loss there was the sensation of relief. It was too much bother to go round and try to attract her to me; the strain of winning her was not worth while. I felt easier, more comfortable, more serene at home.

V

Perhaps, also, remaining at home enabled me to ignore the war. The hard work of a long day, followed by this

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cloistering at home, prevented contact with elements that were discomposing. . . .

One was always encountering the eyes, and sometimes the hints of people who did not understand one's circumstances. They did not recognize that some people had definitely important work to do, work that was, in its way, as significant as the work of the enlisted soldier. One could not always be explaining, and also I hated explaining. With some, of course, one had no chance of explaining.

In these days I had a definite unease. But, again, I do not think it arose from the feeling that I was shirking. My work still filled a more important place in my mind than the war. My work meant something to me, the war meant very little. I had not shed the atmosphere into which I had sunk. I felt that I was a rather important person, doing rather important things, that I was "different." It was not my lack of interest in the war, but the failure of people to recognize my obvious "difference" that gave me my secret disturbance in public. For that reason perhaps I clung more to my home.

But there was no getting away from this absurd world madness even at home. Into the middle of our serenity, Hugh, with a curious worry on his face and a deep, lobster-red tint in his skin, arrived with Bee.

Hugh had joined up. Not only had Hugh joined up, but Bee, as her hands showed, was washing cups and plates at a canteen.

It was so amazing as to border on a joke. That Hugh, a musician, should be bitten by this strange germ seemed to us to be outside the limits of ordinary reasoning. Hugh was the last possible person one could imagine as a soldier. And yet he sat, looking weary and worried and fit in one, his strangely scalded skin giving him a grotesque air, and talked with an angry bitterness of his training. The

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futility and pettiness of military life, the dullness and profanity of noncommissioned officers.

"They don't know how to handle men. They act like warders or bullies simply because they don't know how to do their own jobs—they don't understand how to draw out the best in us. It's a hell of a waste of brains," he would wail. And he was furious at the ruin of his clothes through lack of uniform.

We stared at him in wonder, trying to get used to the abnormality. My mother, speaking out of the wisdom of The Hill, asked him why he was a private. "Really, a *private* now. Why *didn't* you become an *officer*, Hugh?" she asked again and again. "It would have been *nicer* for you to be an officer."

"I couldn't," cried Hugh, "I couldn't do it. I couldn't accept the responsibility. I'm not built that way."

My mother and father were slightly irritated at this harping on responsibility. They couldn't see it. To them a commission was a social status. It wasn't a "nice" thing to be a private. Responsibility—what had that to do with it? You were an officer because you came from a nice family. Owen, of course, was in a different category; he hadn't a commission, but a dispatch-rider was something so distinctive—almost an officer.

At length they accepted it as part of Hugh's queerness. It was the sort of *déclassé* thing one would expect from a musician. Perhaps it was the cloven hoof peeping out at last—he had no real conception of what was "the thing." It was harder to accept the fact that he had joined up at all.

"Just imagine it," my mother said, "you enlisting! Who would have thought that you were the sort that liked fighting?"

"But,—but, by God, I hate it," snarled Hugh. "I loathe the very idea of it. I sweat over it at night. It

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fills me with fear. And it's not merely the thought of getting killed, going out before one's work's done." How we resented his tactless and very ill-bred talk of death. "It's not that so much, after all; if you're killed, you're killed, and you don't worry any more. But it's the beastliness of it all. This wallowing in mud; dirty clothes, filthy conditions; these damnable bull-intellected sergeants. . . ."

Our wonder at him was a terrible thing.

"You hate it——" I cried. "Then why on earth did you do it?"

Hugh made a tremendous, baffled gesture with both hands.

"Could I have borne myself if I hadn't?" he cried, as though that would bring complete understanding to our minds.

Did it? I don't think it did at the time. It was a contradiction. It seemed to us another indication of Hugh's madness, the sort of thing to expect from a hair-brained musician. And yet—from that day I dated a curious inner shame that began to burn uncomfortably within me. Hugh, I saw, was like me; he had work to do, but he had joined up.

We talked then of what my mother called "ways and means." It was a vague throwing out of suggestions, generally beginning,

"Now let us see what we can do about Bee. We must look at it from the way it will affect Bee; what can we do . . . ?"

It should have been just such a talk as my mother loved, long, rambling, inconclusive, with all the threads loose and indefinite, with heaps of suggestions thrown out, and nothing at all settled. The talk never reached its full, luscious ripening. We weren't going to see what we could do about Bee. We weren't going to do anything

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for Bee. Bee had already settled everything without waiting to hear the ripper wisdom of the grown-up. She was not coming to stay with us. She was going to remain on at her flat. No good telling her she was young; she was conscious that she was also married. She was going to do her canteen work in the afternoons. She would live on Hugh's royalties, the interest from his investments *and* his separation allowance. There was no room for pleasant speculative talk; Bee had her future cut and dried.

A strange, almost an unnatural, pair, we agreed afterwards, for Hugh backed Bee up in everything. Indeed it was difficult for us to grasp their singular madness. As they went away I said to Bee in accents of amusement,

"I can't get over it. I can't get over Hugh, old Hugh, joining up."

Bee on the doorstep examined me critically for a moment,

"No, I suppose you can't, Donald," she said after that pause, but speculatively and not in her old, ruthless manner. "If you could you would have joined up yourself."

"Eh?" I blurted.

"You're young and you're unmarried," she said.

I was really taken aback at her speaking of the matter so plainly.

"They wouldn't take me with my wanky sight," I muttered, touching my *pince nez* to make her conscious of an affliction I had only just then thought of.

"You never know until you try," she said in her old sharp tone.

"We're doing government work, too. Quite important military work, and we're frightfully short-handed," I said, feeling mean all the same.

"Rats!" she said. "It's the damned old apron-strings still hitched round you. Why *don't* you get outside yourself, Donald?" She made a step away from me along the

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path to the gate. Then she came back with her face alight. "It is, Donald, you know it is," she cried. "Underneath it all you're so decent. Why can't you see that all this, even the war, is your chance? You can break away. . . . Owen did. He saw."

VI

The whole world had gone mad, the whole world was conspiring to get at me, to drive me out of my smooth and easy groove. Hugh and Bee had upset me profoundly, Hugh more than Bee, really. I tried to erect a barrier between them and my consciousness, by telling myself that they were a strange mad pair. But thinking of Hugh as a wayward musician and of Bee as one who had let her instinct for saying sharp things run away with her, carried no conviction. I was woefully uneasy. And before I could recover I lunched with Agnes; I had begun to do this once more. And Agnes, too, was in it. Agnes was serving in her own way.

"I've got to earn," she said cheerfully. "I've to help keep the home together. My father's allowance is not enough, you know. I can't do much really, Donald. But I've found out that they want V.A.D.'s to do Sunday work at the local hospital—mainly washing up teacups and things I'm afraid, but it's something. I start next Sunday."

It was a topic I would not have started, but since it had come up I felt it absolutely necessary to explain myself to her.

"Yes, we can't all do the big things . . . I mean we have to do what we can. Somebody, for instance, has got to do the sort of thing we are busy upon at the office. We're up to the neck in absolutely essential work, you know."

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I suppose her answer was not at all helpful. I must have found something in its quality that challenged, for there was a pause. I fiddled with a salt-caster uneasily, beginning to tell myself that she was one of those who did not understand. And I wanted to impress her. Curiously, I wanted to impress her enormously. I felt I must explain things to her, get her on my side, and then I said quite abruptly, unexpectedly even to me,

"I say, Agnes, do you think I ought to join up?"

She looked at me squarely for a moment; then she answered,

"I don't do other people's thinking in a matter like this."

"It's rather hard to settle it all oneself," I said, conscious all the time that I had never attempted to settle it myself, that I had never faced it. "There are so many things to consider. There's my work, special sort of work, and, at the present time, tremendously important, and there are other things." What they were I could not formulate, but I felt there were other things. "You see it's a big problem."

Agnes looked at me kindly, and yet distantly.

"It really is a thing one must settle for oneself," she said.

"I suppose . . . if you were in my place, would you join up?"

"If I were in your place I'd know how you looked at things, and then I'd be able to decide. Could some one else do your work?"

I did not like her limiting my work to the present. As I looked at it my work represented all the future, all the things I wanted to do, my ambitions, the solid things that would bring marriage with—with Barbara, yes, I supposed Barbara. But I could not explain this to Agnes. I merely said,

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"Well, it's rather special work, government work, you see, and we're short-handed. I don't suppose anybody else could do it, not at short notice."

She nodded and took me on trust. She even treated me as a martyr to duty. She said that somebody had to do the spade-work behind the scenes, and that people did not appreciate how necessary they were. She was as entirely candid, as I felt I had not been. I thought it splendid of her, and it was her mere splendidness that upset me, that quickened the disturbance within me to an active shame. Her generous acceptance of my word had exposed me to myself. I felt mean. I knew. I had not been honest with her. I had not attempted to find out if I was indispensable; I had never even tackled the matter squarely. In the way of my kind I had evaded it, and had not even found out if there were any reasons why I should not enlist; I had merely felt that I should not.

VII

Agnes' candor worked in my heart. It awakened me to the whole atmosphere of insincerity in which I lived. All my life I had been pretending things were what they were not. And yet even though I felt mean, I still felt the filaments of my environment about me. In spite of my discomposure I felt that somehow I wasn't one of those who ought to go. But now I had to argue with myself, I would say,

"But they wouldn't look at me with my bad sight." And immediately I would hear Bee's voice, "You never know until you try." And I saw men in Holborn wearing *pince nez*, even as I did, and they were in uniform.

I yawed away from that line of reasoning. I went back to my work. It *was* important government work, and we *were* short-handed. I couldn't be spared. But as

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I thought of this I was aware that it was, on the whole, rule of thumb work, that it wasn't so intricate, and that, in any case, I hadn't put the matter to the test by asking Hall Milne.

Yet, though I was uneasily conscious of all these facts, it did seem to me that my work was the only leg I had to stand on. We really were busy, we really were short-handed and the work was important. . . . I could not see Hall Milne pleased at my going. And if he were against it—well, that would settle my mind, I thought.

One day at lunch I said to Agnes,

"I'm going to ask Hall Milne to-day whether he can spare me. I feel that I must settle it definitely." I said this not altogether honestly. I had the air of one determined to make the supreme sacrifice, with the comfortable feeling, all the time, that Hall Milne was the one to prevent my doing it. Agnes looked at me sharply. Astonishing girl, there was a sudden dismay, something that was both tender and frightened in her face. Because of that unexpected and gentle look, and the faint blush that spread delicately beneath her curiously soft and vital skin, my whole being flared into intimacy and candor, I cried,

"I don't want to go. I loathe the whole idea. But there it is. I must find out."

"It's frightfully hard, Donald," she said softly. "Oh, I know, I know."

And I knew she knew. She knew everything, right down to my ambition, my desire to do good and splendid work. I was warmed by the completeness of her understanding. And I had a curious feeling that I had missed a good deal in not getting onto the gorgeous footing of intimacy with Agnes before, that I had such a lot to make up. I tried even then to make it up. That lunch hour was ridiculously short for all the things we had to say about ourselves and our work . . . the way I had been switched off, side-

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tracked from the things I wanted to do most. What I wanted to do most was still the big things, the splendid and august buildings, the important structures that would impose me largely upon the admiration of people I knew. I felt, vaguely, that I had never really got to grips with this ambition. I had never had a good chance.

"Somehow, I've never been able to get going. These infernal pubs stood in my way. Always these commonplace, practical, everyday things were there to do, when I wanted to do something big."

It was still the big things, the solid, important buildings with me. When Agnes said, but so gently that I was not touched on the raw,

"If you had followed out that idea you had about cottages, do you think things would have come better for you, Donald?"

We were being direct and candid with each other. I gave this point what I considered most candid thought.

"No," I answered, and I was certain of myself. I had seen in practice that cottages did not pay. "No, I don't think it was that. The cottage idea was a sort of calf love. It was a phase I went through. It was something which I was to develop out of, and I did develop along those lines. Those first inns, which were not so bad, you know, and that Guardians' building grew out of that feeling for pretty, graceful things. . . . But, really, I feel the line I am after is something finer, more classic, bigger. I'm certain about those cottages. It was just a phase."

I was decided about them. Those small things had nothing in them for me. Years of work on bigger structures had filled me with a condescending contempt for them.

Our talk had given me a glowing strength that made it easy for me to approach Hall Milne. And yet I did

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this with a certain amount of dissimulation. I approached the matter obliquely. I said I supposed that since we were so busy upon such important government work, it would be scarcely right for me to leave the firm in the lurch and enlist. I did not use those exact words, but that was the substance of what I said. I held out to him the chance of insisting on my remaining.

And to my secret dismay he took it as a patriot.

He assumed at once that I had spoken to him because I was anxious to enlist. He said with stunning directness,

"A blasted nuisance, Harbour . . . but then, everything is at this time. We can't help ourselves, just as you can't help yourself. You've got to go. We've got to do what we can. There it is."

In the incoherence this brought to my mind, I could only blurt out,

"You don't think that in special work like this . . . ?"

"But it's not special work, is it? Not from an architect's point of view," he jerked. "Special from the government's point of view, yes. They're in a hurry. But, as you know, there's nothing in it; mere rule of thumb. Merle (the old architect who had been brought into my room) and his clerk can do all that's to be done. It'll mean harder work, longer hours—but, dammit, that's to be expected. That's what we old ones have to do."

I felt bereft and helpless. That there was nothing special in my work, nothing that the ordinary common or garden architect's clerk could not do, not only deprived me of my last hope, but hurt my *amour propre*. It was impossible that I was valueless, that my work was without significance.

I could not bear to think this. I must get a definite appreciation from Hall Milne of my particular and significant value. Like many men when they are overtired, *he seemed inclined to be talkative*. He was taking a

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breather from a too close concentration on humdrum work by making a sweeping survey of architecture and the effects of war on architecture. In that broad, wandering talk he touched upon the part played by Hall Milne and Baddick, and, I don't quite know how, probably allusive remarks from me switched him towards the thing I wanted discussed, presently he was talking about me. Just a touch from me, just a hint as to the big things that this war would prevent my doing, set him off, set him off with his shattering Midland candor,

"No, Harbour, you'll never do anything worth a tinker's cuss in classic design. You don't get there at all. The big proposition's not your line—quite out of your element."

With a startled mind and sick heart I pushed in,

"But is it? After all, that Guardians' building was not bad. You remember, you thought well of it. Don't you think that showed me capable . . . ?"

He jumped right in on me,

"No, *that* was luck. It caught you just at a phase, you remember. You were feeling about in what Baddick calls 'rustic stuff,' then, country houses, cottages, and all that sort of thing. Well, obviously, eh, your feelings were colored by the medium you were experimenting in. It was luck. You got just the right sort of building to do, at the time when, emotionally, you wanted to do that sort of building. It was blasted good, but there it was, just a natural spark struck from a phase in your development. It was the same with those 'idyllic inns' of yours."

I couldn't believe myself a failure; Hall Milne must be mistaken.

"But surely don't you think I might have developed out of that beginning?"

"What, from the Guardians' building? Oh, Lord, no. . . . Don't you remember I tried you? You remember

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that neoclassic stuff you did . . . ? Well, I had to work you back on pubs."

This was deadening; so I had been "worked back on pubs" designedly. But I couldn't believe it. I cried, still thirsting after hope,

"What was wrong with my neoclassic? Too ambitious, too grotesque . . . ?" If I could only see myself as a leader in a new movement, and misunderstood . . . that would satisfy.

"Too—too damned ordinary. You did what everybody did, even the little tricks. . . . Commonplace. Oh, you couldn't be blamed; it wasn't your forte, you see. You were merely like everybody who gets out of the rut . . . a collector of stock ideas, a sort of polite selector of accepted designs . . . even down to the tricks. No . . . in big stuff you are right out of your depth."

I stared at him miserably; what a crashing down of ambitions he had brought about! How definitely was I in the dust, a nothing, a nobody! I was completely abased. In my bitterness I said,

"I suppose I *was* out of my depth . . . but . . . what *is* my depth . . . pubs?"

"Well, you have neat ideas there, haven't you? You do sound work in that graceful, pretty *genre*. . . ."

"Anybody can do that sort of thing," I said harshly, but even in my bitterness craving some comfort. It didn't come.

"I suppose—so," agreed Hall Milne. "Yes, I suppose most competent architects could do it. But it came, at first, with a certain freshness, a quaintness: charm: a sort of memory left over from your rustic phase."

My rustic phase; it came up again and again in his talk, as though it had impressed him. And the repetition of the words turned his mind back to it. As I sat there saying nothing, feeling pulverized and with my life lying

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broken about me, he went on talking of it. Talking astonishingly.

"A disappointment when you took that twist away from cottages, Harbour. I, Baddick and I, well, frankly, we were rather hopeful at first. It seemed so promising. We thought you had a chance of doing something good along those lines. And when you swung away—well, we were disappointed. Of course, we ought to have anticipated it. All young architects do go through phases of that sort. Pass through them, too, as you did. Leave 'em right behind. But—but, well, we thought you had hold of something. And—and you hadn't."

I stared at him, astonished, and with horror in my astonishment.

"My cottages," I gasped, "you mean—you mean to tell me you thought I might do something there—I mean something really extra good?"

"Yes, we did," said Hall Milne. "At the time we thought we saw something a bit above the ordinary in them. Fact, some of your early cottage designs had a quality; a snap; you know, an atmosphere of vitality and, yes, enthusiasm. I, Baddick and I, were telling ourselves that we had spotted a winner. . . . Why, we even talked about 'the Harbour touch,' . . . and then you took that swerve away from them. . . ."

"You don't mean to tell me my cottages really were good?" I said again; this was staggering.

"But I've been telling you so all the time. We were rather cock-a-whoop, y' know, saw the firm making a definite splash. . . . But there you are, human nature plays tricks' always . . . you *did* take that twist."

We went on talking, about my enlistment, what they would do when I went. . . . Hall Milne would keep my place open for me . . . we hammered out all the practical details. But all the time I was but half conscious of what

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was going on. I was standing bemused amid the ruins of my life. I was looking dully at the mess my folly had brought. I might have done big things; I had done nothing. He had mentioned "the firm" making a definite splash. That meant I would have been one of the firm, a partner. . . . And I was nothing, I saw what had happened—I had chucked a divine impulse in order to do big, solid commonplace things. In following the light of The Hill I had become as ordinary as The Hill, as ordinary as every other male in it, so ordinary that Hall Milne and Baddick thought me of no particular value. They could pick out any ordinary fellow to do the sort of work I did. That's why I had not been taken into partnership. It would have been like taking into partnership one of their unqualified clerks.

VIII

Agnes sat in front of me at lunch, talking quietly and steadily, and with a certain serenity as though everything was everyday. It was her way of meeting my attitude of misery. She saw it when she sat down, but she went on looking at me steadily with her gentle eyes; there was nothing jarring about her.

When I said,

"I went to the recruiting office yesterday," I noticed a tightening, not of the features, but of the soul behind. "I went to the Inns of Court. They turned me down."

Yes, there *was* a flash of new color in her face when she heard that, but she made no sign of pleasure or of commiseration.

"Your eyes?" she said.

"Partly that, and something else, something that was surprising. I hadn't expected it." I realized her troubled

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glance. "Oh, nothing that matters really, except to a man who has to march and work as hard as a soldier."

I couldn't tell her what it was. I was still full of The Hill's refinement. I couldn't bring before her the picture of myself in Adamite nothingness, standing before that tired doctor who had his fingers on my body and who was adjuring me to "Cough." I had coughed. His tiredness had suddenly given way to a spark of interest, as though he had found something notable in the midst of commonplace days. He quickened as he had not quickened when he tested my eyes; he had not been pleased with my eyes—though I, with a curious honesty, had tried to make the best of them. He asked me to cough again and again, feeling me with those quiet, nervous fingers. He had paused a moment thinking, and continued with his general examination, only to return to the coughing at the end.

Then he had said, "Sorry, 'fraid you don't do. Don't worry, though; scores of men going about with the same thing without harm to themselves. But a fighter has to stand a lot of unexpected strain. You'll be all right as a civilian—as a soldier, no. Now go away cheerful and don't worry."

I could not tell Agnes this; I could not tell her I had been rejected because of the danger of hernia.

While Agnes was taking it all in, not speaking, I went on,

"What's more, the same thing happened three days ago, at the Artist's Rifles. The doctor there, however, was even more emphatic."

Still she said nothing.

"So I'm out of it," I finished. Perhaps I expected her to say she was pleased. She might even have uttered the conventional "Hard luck," but I didn't expect that very much. Agnes was never anything but honest. Instead she

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said, and she seemed to me to get to the heart of my misery in an astonishing way,

"Hall Milne found he could spare you, then?"

I saw she saw beneath the facts of my rejection, and knew in her sure and splendid way that the real tragedy was something deeper than that. There was an immense comfort in her singularly warm and generous understanding. I looked at her, and felt I must take something from her, something she would willingly give. I said, trying with a wry smile to give the matter a jocular air,

"Do you remember saying something to me about an enthusiasm for cottages wriggling back to an ambition for cathedrals?"

I saw her lips compress, and there was pain in her eyes. She said nothing, she could say nothing; only her hand slipped across the table, and her warm fingers lay over mine.

"Well . . . well, you were right," I said, trying to keep a steady voice. "I wriggled back to cathedrals. . . . Hall Milne has let me know how right you were."

She still said nothing, still pressed my hand.

"Didn't you say you hated human tragedies? . . . Well, that's what has happened. I should have kept on at my cottages; that was the thing in me. You saw that. And—and I've—what was it Bee said?—sold my soul and not gained the whole world."

She pressed my hand, drew it back. She smiled with her courageous gentleness. Her face lifted, a bold and gallant gesture. And she shot at me a soft and astonishing sentence,

"How lucky of you to find out so young, so early."

I stared at her.

"Don't you see, Donald," and her voice was cool and delicious, "if it had come when you were old and tired,

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when you couldn't go back, how awful it would have been?"

That did little to remove my misery.

"But I can't do cottages any more," I cried with dogged misery.

"You can. You will," she said, her fine ardor leaping out at me. "You're young, Donald. Oh, but it's the greatest luck for you, don't you see that?"

"It's you who don't understand. I can't do them any more. I've tried. . . ." I shuddered as I remembered those frantic attempts I had made to get back after I had spoken to Hall Milne, the awful sugar-cake designs, their harrowing triteness. "I've made drawings. It's no good. I can't recapture the feeling. It's gone."

She smiled at me, that clear, confident and glowing smile.

"You're young, Donald, awfully young. Such a boy." How exquisite she did seem as she spoke. "You will get back."

"The feeling's lost," I said.

"It is now, perhaps. Wait." She sat smiling at me, sure of herself. I looked at her, wishing I could feel her certainty, and yet smiling too because of her absurd and superb confidence. I felt that I was finished, and yet,

"Bee said the war was my chance," I said inconsequently.

"Did she?" Agnes smiled. "She would. Bee is awfully clear-headed, Donald."

CHAPTER VI

I

BETWEEN my talk with Agnes in the Strand luncheon rooms and the time I came to know Harry Keenan lies a period of nearly two years. But they were years of dull evenness in which, apart from Agnes, there was no light for me. Keenan's coming into my life was actually the next thing that matters.

I remember my first intimate contact with him. He came limping along the pinched little French street, his rubber-tipped stick digging heavily into the ground. I remember I had to swing a bundle of accounts to my right hand in order to salute. He returned it, and went on, looked round at me and called,

"I say—isn't your name Harbour?"

"Yes, sir," I said nervously; my about-turn would have won profanity at Farnborough.

"Aren't you a builder or something, Harbour?"

"Architect, sir," I said.

"Thought so," he said, "and that damned sergeant gave me a process engraver when I asked for some one to do ground measurements."

He stood before me, his short and very thick figure slanting to the right because of his maimed leg. His curiously eager eyes looked out from his immature face which had, at the same time, the air of determination that comes from a thrusting and fanatic chin. I already liked him, though I had never spoken to him. He was a jolly boy, with a sort of drive about him. He had an air

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which, I thought, marked him out from the rest of the quite wild Pilots and Observers of the Brigade H.Q. where I was serving, though, at times, he could be as rowdy as any. He had the Pilots' wings "up" himself, though owing to his hurt he was not on the flying strength, but doing equipment work.

He stood looking at me, and I suppose there was a half smile on both our faces at the extraordinary expectedness of that damned sergeant. Of course he would detail a process engraver to do surveyor's work, and of course a surveyor, like myself, would be posted to deal with pay. That was the way of the army.

"You are a real architect?" said Keenan. "I mean you can do ground measurements?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"What's your number, Harbour?"

"5-4-9-8-4, 2nd A.M."

"Right-o, I'll talk to that sergeant." Then, after the tiniest pause, he said, "What sort of buildings did you do, Harbour?"

"Inns, mostly, sir. There was one on the river, at Tweely. The Chalet."

"By Jove," he said eagerly, "was that yours? I've often been there. A toppingly pretty pub." He looked at me intently, and I think that he was going to say something more, but he thought better of it, and said instead, "All right, Harbour, I'll speak to that sergeant."

II

And next day I went into Harry Keenan's office in the one time drawing-room of the home of a well-off French trader. Keenan, or to give him his full name Sir Henry Keenan, was ridiculously young to be a baronet. "Far too young to be prudent, Harbour," as he once said to

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me with his vivid grin. In fact he ought to have been at the university and not a baronet at all. The war, which had caught him young ("Before my mind became set and calculating," as he had it), killed his cousin who had held the title and the big estates in Sussex. He had joined the R.F.C. straight from school, had flown at the Front, and had "crashed" there. He had been so badly damaged in his right leg that his flying days had ended almost as soon as they began. I believe the doctors wanted to pass him out of the army, as he was always suffering from his injury, but Keenan insisted upon remaining in the R.F.C., and, as he always had a good deal of influence, he did remain. He had been given an E.O. (Equipment Officer) job at Farnborough, and later had come out again to France, where he was doing excellent work dealing with the planning and equipment of the constantly shifting *aërodromes* behind the Front.

As we were thrown intimately together from the first day I went into his branch, I very quickly appreciated the curious and fervent capacity that in one of his extreme youthfulness seemed so unexpected. He was not merely a brilliant boy, but he had that strange blend of buoyant gayety and intense idylism which makes the modern youth. That is, though he took his pleasures with a reckless, even a jazz abandon, he could break off in the middle of them to plunge with an intense zest into discussions of social science and the imperative necessity of creating a new and better world after the war. As with many of the young men of his day, he was entirely sincere and without affectation, and, also, he was almost bitterly practical.

"The war's given the young man the whip hand," he said to me one day. "It's caught us young, shown us what the state of the world is, and what to do about it, before we've lost snap and drive." He grinned with fierce intentness at me. "Look at me. I've got the money,

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position and power to do things that the young dream of doing. That's come to me before the world had got hold of me, before I've become comfortable and clubby and careful about my own interests. . . . Before I've become a leave-well-aloner; an everything-is-for-the-best-in-the-best-of-possible-worlds old fossil."

And I remember his answering, in a slight jeering note, a Major who had said,

"I say, Keeny, why the devil *do* you stick on in this pig of a life when the high-spots of London are yours for the taking?"

"I'm studying how to make the world a fit place for heroes to live in, old top. Gettin' my facts first hand."

The Major took that slightly jeering retort as a good joke. But it wasn't a joke. With Keenan it was dead earnest. He had a problem at the back of his mind, and he did want to study it first hand and with that curious maturity in youth that war had given him. And the material he wanted to study first hand was the private soldier.

In this way his attitude was rather more "democratic" with me than the Old Army liked. In the office this was not so pronounced; though, as we got to know each other better we had many long talks there, since we worked in a room alone. But his chief opportunity arose during the long rides we took in the Vauxhall along the Front on our incessant examination of likely grounds for new aërodromes. At first I rode in front with the M.T. driver, but when Keenan had assessed me, he had me back with him, and though we took endless journeys we never seemed to exhaust ourselves in our discussions, in which I, as a private, was able to give him definite confirmation of many facts he had only by hearsay. It was due to his desire to have me talking beside him that led him, I think, to exercise his undoubted faculty for pulling wires. I was pro-

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moted, almost with violence, first to the rank of 1st A.M. and corporal, and then to that of sergeant. An intimacy with a sergeant attracted less attention than one with a private.

III

I had obtained a fairly intimate knowledge of the private soldier, not only from my own experience, but also from those of Owen and Hugh.

We had had Owen back in England, before, after several rejections at the hands of military doctors, the easier physical scale of the Derby Scheme caught me up into the army.

Owen had, in a sense, been "different," in the matter of wounds, but not quite in the way my mother had thought. After months of strenuous, and for him, attractive living as a dispatch-rider, he had taken a bad toss in a shell-hole in The Salient, and had been returned to England with a broken left arm. His hurt was what he called a "cushy" one, for his arm was very slow in regaining its strength—in fact it is not yet sound—and though he was not discharged, his disability forbade all heavy work. A lucky thing for him, he insisted, for it was just about the time when fit men were being combed out of the noncombatant arms into the Infantry. Incapable of handling a rifle, he was transferred to an A.S.C. unit in Brighton, where he became an M.T. (Motor Transport) driver and wallowed in the lap of luxury—his own expression, for, as he said, he knew how the infantry lived at the Front, and could be duly grateful. He remained with the unit until the end of the war.

Hugh, if you are to believe him, had had "colossal luck." He had gone to France as an infantry private. He had fought at Loos without a scratch, and then "the

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divine idea of concert parties floated along the line" and Hugh, who had already a name as an entertainer, pianist and parodist, was first drawn into the regimental Pierrot troop, and then into the one organized by Division. Hugh, on leave, had spoken of this quite honestly. He said he had got his job through funk. He said he had tried to "stick it" out—the mud and the wretched conditions, the strain and the fighting of the trenches, but had gone under, or had nearly gone under with neurasthenia. What happened, as far as I can gather, was that his company officer—and company officers though they appeared aloof were quite often pretty acute—had had his eye on Hugh. He had seen that an imaginative nature like Hugh's was being called upon to meet a strain beyond its strength. He saw that Hugh's brain would probably go before Hugh's will, that the musician would stay "on duty" until his reason gave way. Being wise he probably decided that Hugh as a source of enjoyment to the regiment was of infinitely more value than a Hugh liable to create an ugly incident in the trenches. Therefore quite tactfully he set about withdrawing my brother-in-law from the line and started him on a war career in which I think he did an immense good—anyhow his concert party (he was actually the uncrowned king, he had a "Thora" singing subaltern over him) achieved great fame in the war zone. Hugh, also, remained a private during all his service, refusing to fall in with a suggestion made by influential friends at home that he should take a commission.

From Owen and Hugh I obtained much insight into the working of the private's mind, and much of what they told me tallied with my own experiences, for though my service had been short, from the very nature of it it had been drastic.

I had been graded low in my examination under the Derby Scheme, and as with many who enlisted then, felt

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that months lay between me and the time when I should be called up. My mother and my father were firm in this conviction. My mother was quite confident that the War Office would not so far forget its sense of responsibility as to take a youth so obviously unfitted as her elder son. Even Agnes, at our now settled and consistent lunches, felt this. We acted as though the crisis was so far away, and that my chance of ever getting near the Front was so remote that we could discuss it with easiness.

"In one way, it would not be a bad thing for you, Donald, if you were called up," said Agnes. "You won't be called upon to do any fighting, and yet the change will be the drastic upheaval you want."

"You mean I'm so tied down to my drawing-board at Hall Milne and Baddick's that I don't have time and opportunity to get away from routine jobs. . . . To try to get back. Is that it?"

"Yes. What you want is a change that will give you a complete jolt. You've got so into your groove. That's why you can't get back to your cottages yet. To be flung into the army, to have to go through that strong and, oh, unpleasant, animal life. To live hard . . . and pick up cigarette ends and weed the barrack flower-beds as Owen had to when he went to his depot—why, that'd turn you over and over. It'd be such a complete change, such a complete renewal."

"Oh, would it?" I grinned. "It seems to me that your cure is damnably uncomfortable. It's reawakening by bomb explosion." But I saw what she meant, and I felt that there was something in it. But it was all so uncomfortable that I held it to the dim future where I thought it belonged.

And then one day she was looking with a face whiter than I had ever thought of seeing, at a narrow buff slip,

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ordering me to rejoin the army on a day a fortnight hence.

Her drastic cure had come drastically. Still feeling that all this couldn't happen to me, that when I arrived at the depot I should be sent back home, and that my comfortable life would continue evenly, I was pitchforked into the army. The effect was detonative. I stepped from an easy and rather consequential somebody into an uncomfortable and frowzy less-than-nobody; for from the first those in my squad were made to understand that the slightest attempt at individuality would mean that we were "for it."

It was an experience too bizarre to be true, I felt. I was snapped at by sergeants, while my clothes supported me in my rather superior contempt for sergeants. I was marched through the streets. I was poked into a hut, where we snatched timidly at blankets, smelling of all the humanity they had enfolded since the outbreak of war. I slept on boards that found out all my angles. I was put in my place by an Orderly Room officer, a subaltern whose office seemed to be to test the limits of control of all new recruits by a well-applied profanity. I was marched through the streets again and crowded into a third-class carriage. At the R.F.C. Depot a spoon and a fork were served out, and blankets, and we were crowded into tents—sixteen in one tent.

The tremendous shock of that upheaval was infinitely beyond anything Agnes and I had dreamed of. Its effect was to deprive me of any faculty for thought; I became simply stupid. Followed a month of unreality. Drilling on Queen's Parade, when I tried to master the intolerable Slow March by which the R.F.C. hoped to rival the Guards in drill—intolerable, not because it was difficult, but because our instructors made it difficult. They seemed incapable of teaching us; their only method was

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to bully us into it. Only when a corporal, a mechanic and not an instructor, handled my squad quietly and sympathetically did I master the step; then, because the man explained and did not bully I had it in ten minutes. Drills were blessedly broken into by "fatigues," rough simple work at the aircraft factory, scrubbing huts and recreation rooms in the Marlborough lines, rolling the officers' cricket pitch, even, as Agnes had foreseen, collecting "fag ends and match stales" and weeding the flower-beds round the barracks. They were changes from the monotony of drilling, they meant doing things—though "swinging the lead" was a tradition, and rather than fill out a blank day with occupation, men slacked immediately the sergeant's back was turned. To do as little as one can, that is the army tradition.

And over all was the brooding cloud of authority, which meant sergeants. Self-respecting citizenship did not help one here. For the slightest thing, for things unremembered or never known, one was "for it." Punishments were flung at men who had never been punished in their lives. Men were punished if they went sick, so that men did not go sick even if they were ill. Men were at the mercy of other men who seemed to have been chosen for authority on the principle that a loud voice and a searching choice in curses was the sole test for non-commissioned officers. And because of this one came to recognize that one was entirely helpless; one might seek the aid of K.R., but that only meant that one would be marked henceforward, that they would "get you" somehow if only on the count of "silent contempt." It was a singular atmosphere; decent, responsible men were the prey of irresponsible muddle and lived under the knowledge that they were at the mercy of a caprice. The gradings that were supposed to safeguard their health did not matter, though Parliament kept up the solemn farce of

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insisting that men in low categories had special treatment, were more lightly handled and so on. Medical examinations were a cynical farce; they depended not on the physical condition of the men, but upon the central medical body's demand for larger returns of "A" men. And the men knew all this, and they were profoundly contemptuous of the whole bag of tricks, the army, the parliamentarians and the rest.

It was a nightmare existence for me, and, I suppose, for thousands and thousands of other men. It had its humors and its good points, but these seemed to me to arise from the sterling qualities of the men themselves; they were always superior to a stupid and unintelligent system—if that system had only been as good as the human material it stultified and wasted, what would have been the effect on the war, I wonder?

The effect on my mind, as I say, was simply to deaden it. I lost all powers of thinking. I became an automaton who did things mechanically with a blank brain. All that I had done, architecture and the rest, was simply sponged out.

"It's as though I had never been anything but an animal," I told Keenan, when I had reached the stage when I could speak to him freely. "Architecture has been stamped out. I never think of it. I'm not interested in it. It's as though it never was. I don't believe I could draw a house if I wanted to—and the damnable fact is that I don't want to."

IV

It was not this side that Keenan and I most touched on, though we talked of it occasionally, as something that we'd like to change. We talked more of the men who made up the army, and particularly what were their

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ideas of life, and what they were looking forward to after the war.

As Keenan said,

"It's a chance in generations for us all to get to know each other. We're all so mixed up together that we can get in touch in reality, and not through paper opinions and reports. Personally I've become rather shy of theorists. . . . These people who are just now giving off a lot of hot air about the neat, right-angled, everything-in-his-proper-place world that is coming after the war, when good, sturdy, well-disciplined Tommy will function automatically and happily like a piece of well-planned machinery. . . . I don't quite see all this perfection blooming."

"I don't, either," I answered. "They've got hold of the wrong end of the stick, these New Worlders. They think that Tommy is keen about reconstruction. He's not. He's keen about having a good time."

"That's how I'm feeling. I think that this war has been an eye-opener to the Tommy, and not in the way the throb-writers think. All this Brotherliness, this Comradeness, this Shoulder-to-Shoulder talk . . . this Fusion of Classes . . . Tripe! . . . If Tommy has got hold of the Brotherliness idea, it's only to learn that his Elder Brother has had all the pickings and the good time up to this. And he thinks that it's about time things were evened up. That's how I feel it. Does that fit in with your idea?"

"Lord, yes," I told him. "They've been drafted into this larger life. They've come to camps from small cities; they've come from the country into great towns like London, and they've seen with their own eyes the things that are going on, had a taste of the things themselves. They see all the pleasures and comforts that can be got out of life, that they haven't been getting, and they're asking

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themselves why not. And they're not fools; in fact, most of them are infernally shrewd. They see that in actual brain-power there isn't very much to choose between themselves, and those who are having the good time. If they'd had education and good homes they'd be there, too. Fundamentally they are no different from those who are supposed to be their superiors. They can test that themselves now. It's just the accident of birth that has handicapped them. And they mean to alter that."

"Have they any definite idea how they'll do it?"

"No, not a very definite idea. Some of the older ones think it's to be done through their children. A Belfast felt-maker in my tent dreamed dreams for his posterity that were rather fine. His children weren't going through the things he had had to go through. They were going to be educated and have their chance. Schooling was his answer to the problem; his kids would be put on the square with the best, and it'd be up to them to pick the plums of life. Nearly all looked to good wages and good homes to do the trick. . . ."

"Yes, that's how I'm thinking," said Keenan. "I think that's a sound line."

"They think their homes are a handicap," I went on, "the promiscuity, the lack of amenities, lack of attention from the overworked mother, lack of food, lack of gayety and refinement, the coarseness, the roughness, and yes, the vulgarity of it all . . . 'that's why we're out of it with the nobs, you feel a bloody maggot when you're with them,' that's what one man said to me."

"And the younger chaps, those without children . . . ?"

"Well, they are out for the Good Time pure and simple; so are many of the older men, for the matter of that. You never hear them talk about work, the jobs they are going into when the war's over. This Reconstruction

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stuff leaves them cold. They talk of the good time coming to them when they leave the army; sprees, high old times; women, beer and song; gorgeous 'mikes' on their gratuities. They rarely talk about work, nearly always about pleasures and ease and indolence. And they mean it all. It's the thing that's their due."

"An' I don't blame 'em," murmured Keenan.

And then after a time, he said,

"All the same it's going to be a bit of a problem, this after-the-war business. The clash will come when people expect Tommy to carry on just as he did before the war. They'll expect him to fall back into his old slot. And he won't. He's had a look at the larger life, and he means to have some of it. That seems to me the point from which we've got to start out. We've got to try to give the laborer not what we think he ought to have, but what he wants himself—or as much of that as we can give. Take the farm laborer now—is he going back?"

"I know one or two that aren't," said I. "They've been snatched out of the country by this war. They've seen towns, been once a week to theaters, or movie shops, or music halls; they've mixed with hosts of their fellows in camp and the Y.M.C.A. huts—and they like it. They're not going back to the fields, too dom dull, too dom lonely . . . that's their idea."

We didn't, of course, argue wholly from the Tommy's point of view. On one ride, and in the middle of the old discussion, Keenan cried,

"It's not all as simple as venting opinions. The whole matter abounds in pitfalls. There's the financial side, for example. I've been trying to hammer something out of that with a fellow who sweats figures, and has a kink for economics. He declares Utopias can't be done. He says that to make Britain fit for heroes means that Britain's going bust, financially. He said that the demands of

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people like myself (apparently we are not alone, Harbour) are outside reason. We're asking more than facts can provide; we want something that isn't there."

"Isn't that an old story?" I asked.

"In a way—and no. He didn't trot out the old argument—I mean the one that proves that if all the wealth of the country were divided evenly the workingman wouldn't be much better off; his share would only be about a shilling a week extra. No, he went over the figures of the Exchequer Estimates with me—and proved his case pretty convincingly. I know I don't trust these mathematicians and money-brains much, they are too unscrupulous, and I know I am rather out of my depth in things like this. But he seemed sound. And he did believe honestly that anything done on an adequate scale would be dangerous for the country."

"And there'll be thousands who think as he does."

"Quite. And there'll be other brakes on the wheel, too. Oppositions, the clash of different plans, the inner workings of interests, suspicion even from the men themselves, lack of material and work—scores of things to slow up the movement. My hat, to look forward makes one depressed, doesn't it? We'll come out of the war into a world that is ripe for a reorganization, a world so upset that the reorganization can be easily done in the mere act of straightening things out—and there'll be muddle. I can smell muddle from here. An awful muddle."

After a while he said,

"There's no plan. You can't look for any direction from those Higher Up. . . . Look here, Harbour, on my last leave I said to a Cabinet chap, 'What about reconstruction? What are you doing about that?' And he told me they had no time to bother about reconstruction just now. Couldn't think about it yet, they'd got to win the war. What do you think of that? The war might

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go fizzle any moment (I know it doesn't look like it, but they've no right to bank on that) and they've got nothing ready. That's an absolute fact. And reconstruction—dammit all, it's something bigger than the war. It's all the world for all the years after the war. It makes the war look like a game, it wants more preparation than any war—and they're leaving it until a later day. My God, Harbour, it's going to be an awful mess up."

We thrashed this out, without any particular acuteness, maybe, but with intense enthusiasm, and we thrashed many other things out. . . . Here I can only give a sketchy indication of the lines along which we developed. I want to show that they were progressing towards a definite point with Keenan, they led him to a decision out of an emotion that, at first, had only been a vague ideal.

You see, whether right or wrong, we had fined away any hope of the Higher Up Ones meeting the after-war situation in the spirit and with the sympathy with which we thought it should be met, or with the promptness and efficiency with which the matter should be handled. We had, or rather Keenan had, cut away all hope of external help, and gradually he wore the matter down to the plain fact that what was to be done must be done by the individual as best he could.

V

We were perhaps egotistic, but we certainly were enthusiastic. I daresay I should have been astonished at the warmth and interest I put into subjects that once I would have shunned as Maeterlinckian. As a matter of fact, I didn't think of my past attitude. Quite the first thing the army had done to me—one of its good points—had been to smash down my aloof attitude towards topics "best left alone." Agnes had begun that process; the

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talks I had taken part in in our tents and in billets had finished it with drastic completeness. In those talks everything was tackled from sex to social reform, and argued with such a directness and a force that their immense reality excited me. I had plunged into them. I had got into the habit of looking at a larger world than The Hill, and analyzing it and enjoying the analysis.

So when Keenan tangled me in those endless talks, I was on an equal footing with him, and I took fire from his enthusiasm, came back to something of the old glow I had felt when I had dreamed of my cottages and the world that would actuate about them. Keenan and Agnes could both knock sparks out of me, quicken me. I hadn't got back to architecture, I didn't want to design; I had, in fact, a curious antipathy towards all that sort of thing, but I had arrived at a state of candid emotion in which I dreamed dreams and tackled things without evasion. I was, perhaps, as Agnes told me in her letter, on the road to reawakening.

And when Keenan and I got down to our individual ideal of what must be done in reconstruction, I was with him in ardor.

On one of the rides, when we had damned the government, and were glaring pessimistically into the deep mists of futility and muddle which we saw ahead, Keenan said,

"Oh, well, we'll have to kick the Higher Up Ones overboard. We'll each have to do the best we can, and if we all do that the aggregate will be the same as national action in the end."

I agreed with him. I resolved then and there that I would do my mite to contribute to the gigantic whole. What I could do I did not know—my plans were as vague as those of the Higher Up Ones we damned. . . . I just had a glowing vision of breaking away from The Hill and from Hall Milne and Baddick. Like one of Mr. H. G.

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Wells' characters, I would "do things," unspecified but glorious.

Keenan had a most definite idea at the back of his more practical mind. After I had enthusiastically agreed, he said slowly,

"There's my place in Sussex. That'll give me enough to work on. It's a big sprawly place, Harbour. There are two villages on it. Just fancy a pup like me controlling the destinies of two whole villages, full of grown-up people, mother-women and brats. And there are a good number of scattered cottages. A devil of a big place. I guess I can do things there. . . . When I think of my place in Sussex, I feel a sort of shame. Without doing a hand's turn I step into control when I'm barely out of my teens. . . . And there are men by the hundreds who have worked there from dawn to dusk all their lives who haven't even the barest grip on the place. At a stroke of the pen I could clear them all out."

"But it's been in your family for years . . . it's been developed by your family," I said, and I daresay it was a remnant of The Hill attitude which made me feel that, however decisive had been our general denunciations, the particularity of this case made it "different."

"And their families have developed it, too," said Keenan. "It's a fact. • Most of the families have been there for generations, working there from dawn to dusk for generations. And they have no position at all. I can tear them up by the roots. Generations of work—it's brought nothing to them."

"Oh, they've had a living out of it."

"So've my people. More than a living, they've become beastly rich. The value of the estate has improved enormously. . . . I've seen the complete returns since the first Keenan lived there. Even allowing for the difference in money values, the increase to us has been enormous. We've

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done something towards it, I admit. We've always had a progressive streak; made the most of the scientific side of agriculture, you know, and all that sort of thing. But even with that, we've got the land, we've got the increased valuation of the land, its increased profits, and a terrifically large wad of investments in sound stock we've got out of our profits. We're rich in an unholy way—or rather I am. That's our side of the business. On the workers' side there's been too little. For all their work they're no better off. Not a foot of the land belongs to them, not even their houses. Their position is still as precarious as when their first ancestor worked for the first Keenan. The war has brought them an increase of wages, but it doesn't help to balance up, really—and there's an increased cost of living anyhow."

He thought for a moment, the thrust of his jaw giving a curious gravity to his immature face.

"I've been into their houses," he said. "No bathrooms. One potty little living room opening onto the road. Crowded little bedrooms, and not enough of them for their families. Kitchen and scullery arrangements frightfully inefficient places that make instead of saving work. . . . Sanitary accommodation, frightful. Whenever I went into one of those cottages I said, 'Thank God, I don't have to live in a place like this.' I simply couldn't stick it. And they have to stick it.

"And, yet even those hovels aren't their own. They pay me for them—sometimes in cash, and sometimes in labor. I can turn 'em out. They've been paying for generations, and I can turn 'em out. . . . I've looked up the figures, the rents paid, the first valuation of the ground, and the cost of building the houses—well, some of the families have paid for those cottages twice over and more. When I figured that out, I wondered how I and my forbears dare call ourselves honest."

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I meant to say something mollifying, soothing after the manner of my upbringing. But at once I remembered a Dorset laborer who had been in my tent in depot. His family had been working on an estate for one hundred and fifty years. He was the last male of his family left on the estate (others had migrated to cities). When he joined up he had left his old mother in his cottage, and his mother had been turned out of it. I don't think the estate owner could help himself—he had to have a new hand in to work his estate instead of the soldier, and the accommodation was needed. But there it was, the woman had not only been cut adrift from the place that had been her home from childhood, but she did not even have the help she might have got if the place had been hers and she could draw its rent. . . . She lived on the soldier's separation allowance, and for a mother that was exceedingly small. This case came to me, and, instead of being soothing, I said candidly,

“Well, that's where you can begin, sir. Don't let them pay for the cottages twice over; take the rents as gradual payments, so that in time they can own their cottages.”

“You think that—well, so do I. I've talked it over with my agent. It seems to me mere justice. My agent thinks I'm quite potty. I can hear him saying, ‘These young men, they're mad.’ And I guess he's praying for the day when I'll grow up and be solid and circumspect, when I'll think of my own interests and my own comforts. . . . But I want to remain young. . . . That's the only hope—that the young shall realize their dreams, shall be drastic and run the risks that comfort-loving middle age won't face.”

From that moment we entered into the captivating fancy of turning Keenan's estates into a new Utopia. All our talk had led up to this. We had cut away all the big speculative national hopes and had got down to this

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as our rock-bottom. National reconstruction, we thought, was going to be a failure, but *we* could be successful here. We turned our backs on the big ideal to tackle the little. What other men did or failed to do elsewhere was no concern of ours; here something would be done.

VI

The mere discussion of the things to do, the piling of detail upon detail, the planning of novelties, the painting of a broad, human picture was sheer joy. We were constantly thinking out what Keenan called "gadgets." We reveled in minutiae. And above all we prided ourselves on our redoubtable humanity. Good homes and good wages and a life made worth living were the foundations upon which we built the jolly, future existence of the agricultural laborers working on the Keenan land, of those agricultural laborers who would return from the war to work on the land. Particularly we gave our attention to the latter.

"If we're to get them back," I cried, remembering some of those early ideals I had vented to Agnes, "it's not merely a matter of good homes. We've got to remember that the country has to set up as a rival to the town. The men who have gone from the fields to the army have tasted the liveliness, the pleasures of the town. If we're going to get them back, we've got to make the countryside as lively and attractive as the towns—or at least compare, with its own particular attractions, so favorably with the towns that men won't mind living there. We've got to do away with the dom dullness and the dom loneliness. We've got to have amusements."

"Rather," said Keenan, "and they'll be real, human amusements. No Maypole dances on the green, or village institutes—I've got one, it's full of bluebottles and dust,

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and the works of Herbert Spencer and Lecky; it's soul depression to go into it. Why should professors design the lives of people who don't want to live like professors? I don't. No, we'll have the things that human beings like . . . 'movie shops' . . . good, honest pubs with sort of Winter Garden lounges, where whole families can go and have a good time in pretty surroundings. Dancing of the real sort, jazz and all that, always; if we can't get a band a gramophone will do. Tea gardens for the summer . . . platforms in both for concerts."

"But *not* village concerts," I jerked in.

"God, no," he said fervently.

"Concerts—well, like those of these army concert parties one gets on the sands at seaside places, good, sterling, vulgar, cheerful stuff. . . . Look at all the material the army has found, it could be utilized after the war."

"Perhaps we could link up with the seaside. . . . Have one of those twice-nightly music hall shows," he said, and I was startled at the way his ideas ran with my early ideas. "We might be able to support such a place, anyhow at intervals, from my two villages and the cottages. . . . If they were all linked together . . . and there are other villages about, too . . . linking them up, linking the whole countryside up, that'd give us great possibilities."

That led to our discussion on transport. As the keenness of our enthusiasm hammered the sparks of ideas from each other, we netted the whole of that area of Sussex in which Keenan's estate, Margaretting, lay with a system of transport. I admit this was an easy thing for us to do, for we were simply dreaming and not facing actual, practical facts, but we did manage to paint for ourselves a splendid picture. We drew vast quantities of material from the war area. We spanned Decauville track by the

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league across fields and along the roadside, with the cheeky adapted motor engines of the battle area, drawing our truck-loads of material and human freight between scores of villages, linking them up. Where Decauville railways could not go, we spanned distances with motor lorries. We pressed all kinds of motor lorries from the light R.F.C. tender to the five-ton truck into our scheme—we would get them all cheap from the surplus left over from the war. With these we linked up not merely our own particular bit of countryside, but the big towns about it, going, even, as far as London and Brinbourne, our nearest seaside city. And by these means we would not only carry goods into our centers at a cheap price—we had a vague but glorious Universal Provider Store to cut the claws of the profiteer in the center of our scheme—and carry our own products from potatoes to honey into the big markets, but we would also use this power to carry people. We would make getting about easy. Friendliness would be simple in our community; thanks to this constant intercommunication, we would make it one big, gregarious social center. More, this system of transport would bring town life and the shops into the closest touch. . . . It would become an easy habit for our people to go for an evening or even a day into the fascinating streets of cities. They would feel they were right in the world, even though they were in the country. We would kill that dom dullness and dom loneliness.

We thrashed out all these schemes with a tremendous but general zest. Our business in these talks was, we tacitly felt, not to particularize too much, but to make a broad general survey. Thus we were mainly unspecific, as yet. In the particular matter of home-planning and town-planning we got no further than the fact that new homes would have to be built, and that they must be comely and practical. There was a reason for our reticence here.

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Until we faced those old homes, in fact, stood among them, as it were, examined them, their sites, their possibilities and the rest, we felt that we could not dogmatize. There was also the financial side to go into. So the housing question was left vague, while we painted our big, generalized background. Our scheme was, no doubt, but splendidly vague, a mere rioting in happy desire and fancy, but we enjoyed the planning of it, we felt again, as I had felt in my early days, that if we leaped towards the stars, we should rise above the commonplace, anyhow. So we talked and talked, defining nothing in particular—not even my part in all this—but feeling that we were really clearing the ground, were building up something of a plan that would help when we came to grapple with the actualities of practical fact.

It was not until we went to Canada that the whole thing solidified into a definite policy.

VII

Our talks were snapped across by my illness. I caught what must have been one of the pioneer germs of Spanish "flu." It involved me in a bout of bronchitis, and ultimately brought me, through hospital, to Farnborough again. In the illness I had occasional chits from Keenan—mainly I felt not displeased to see,—cursing the man who had taken my place for a bonehead. My illness had come to me in the winter of 1916; it was some months, not until the spring of '17, in fact, before I saw him again. I had a hospital leave before going back to Farnborough, and spent it with rather mixed feelings at The Hill. The pleasure of my parents was something that almost made me afraid. Their pretense was such a splendid thing . . . they gave me to understand that they *hadn't* worried about me, they *knew* I was all right, their eyes softly

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giving them the lie. And I lied, too, eliminating the night and day bombing that had sometimes come unpleasantly close, and my rides into the shell zone with Keenan. . . . No good giving them things to think about; it was more than likely I would return to France.

Apart from their dismaying tenderness, they had not changed much. They, for example, seemed to feel that there was something wrong with Nature, that I was not an officer. They lifted up their hearts a little when, after talking a good deal about Keenan and what my father called his calf ideas, I let out that he was a baronet. Keenan's name, which had only been mentioned casually before, seemed to bristle in every conversation, even the most trivial, after that. Indeed, I began to writhe under the constant reference to "Donald's friend, *Sir* Henry Keenan. . . ." But, on the whole, I was rather amused at this little snobbishness. I remember sitting in the drawing-room with a small crowd of friends, hearing the blessed title rising on the waves of small talk and whispering with a grin to Agnes at my side,

"Oh, Lord, *Sir* Henry has come up again. . . . Couldn't we slip into the den, and have a jaw on our own? . . . They'll be asking me to talk aloud about him presently."

Agnes looked at me, her face a little up, with a laughing light in its curious vitality.

"But his name is *Sir* Henry after all, isn't it, Donald? How are we to talk of him without using his title?"

"I know," I grinned back . . . "only they do seem to talk of his title more than him, don't they? It crops up so . . . and that 'we' is wrong. You can get him into conversation without bringing in the 'Sir' . . . Keenan would hate this sort of thing. Shall we get along?"

"I don't know that your mother would like that. . . . Your leave's not very long, Donald," she said smiling.

"Right-o . . ." I smiled back. "It was rather stuffy

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of me. After all, they do rather enjoy it, don't they, the old dears?"

She leaned towards me with a brilliant impulse, her hand rested on my arm,

"Donald—the army hasn't been altogether bad for you," she whispered, laughing. And I knew she meant not my falling in with my mother so much as that, in disliking this snobbishness of our old attitude, I could yet fall in with my mother. I looked at Agnes, my own smile a little rueful,

"Oh, hasn't it? It hasn't been the altogether good you hoped, anyhow. . . . I haven't got back to cottages yet, Agnes."

"Oh, the army hasn't finished with you," she answered lightly. "You've got to go through much more. Remember every one of those pubs and those pompous buildings needs a penance—probably a sergeant. You have to be thoroughly purged, per sergeants, before you can begin again."

Meeting with Agnes had been a particularly thrilling matter. We had kept up a tremendous correspondence, but writing was only the pale satisfaction of our actual meeting. She knew all about my experiences, including sergeants, and she knew all about Keenan. We had so much to talk about. We had talked the Keenan talk exhaustively. I found that Agnes had been plunging into all kinds of literature on our particular subject, she gave a new aspect to it from the theoretical angle. She had accumulated a vast heap of detail from curious sources, from the Port Sunlight and Bournville experiments, from the Letchworth and other, including the Mawson Garden Cities. She had made, even, a special study of labor-saving devices. "A virtue of necessity," she told me; "we can't afford a maid at home. Also I am still washing cups and doing maid's work as a V.A.D. at the hospital."

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That teaches one how really ordinary, common-or-garden housework needs reorganizing and simplifying." She was an enthusiast about Keenan. She talked of him as a sort of utilitarian Rupert Brooke. She declared,

"He was just sheer luck for you—more than you deserved. You have met the one man who could do to you all you needed."

"He hasn't brought me back to cottages, though," I said. "I'm still blank about them. I haven't the slightest inclination to design 'em, or to design anything."

"Bother your cottages," she cried. "You don't deserve ever to get back, if you talk like that . . . only you will."

I don't know that I was in love with Agnes, I don't think I thought about it anyhow, but I know that seeing her, going about as I did with her, talking to her, and, once at least, going up to town and lunching in one of the old haunts with her, gave to that leave a special and radiant quality.

VIII

Barbara I saw very little of. Curling had been killed, but that was not the reason. She had other officers to engage her attention.

I went round to the Majors one evening to pay a call of respect, and I felt out of it. It was not merely that my sergeant's uniform made a sullen note among so many 'subalterns' tunics, but it seemed to me that it was my lower rank that made me less thrilling. I may have been self-conscious, but in that party on a high note, where jazz was king, conversation and laughter were carried on at a shout, and every action was a small riot, I had the sensation of being a dull, country cousin intruding into the bright realms of metropolitan gayety. And they all seemed to talk down to me. I felt that they were making

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me feel at home among so many resplendent beings—and that they were merely doing this because they were really “nice” people. I felt that my presence was tactless.

I was struck by the change in Barbara, she had bloomed into an extraordinary animation. She laughed and talked with a keen loudness, and danced wildly. Her reticence under the stress of war and subalterns seemed to have given way to a dry excitement. I noticed that she didn’t actually talk very much even in this change, though she did keep up a stream of snappy current exclamations. She would stand with one or two superlative subalterns, not speaking, but in some way forming an actual and intense part of their top-note dialogue, and then she would laugh, and it was the unrestraint of her laughter that gave her her new vivacity. And she romped. She had snatchy little encounters with subalterns on sofas, and she flung herself into dancing with an avid abandon. Her hair was bobbed, and so were her skirts—she might have stood as model for all the drawings of the redoubtable “War Flapper.”

Her eyes gleamed in a friendly way when she saw my khaki, but they were friendly on a well-regulated gauge. She cried,

“Cheerio, Donald. Glad to see you’re fit again. Heard you were ill. . . . Having a good time?” She was off again with a lean and sardonic “two pip” called “Monkey,” and that was all the conversation I had with her.

Not an attractive or inspiring evening. My only abiding memory of it was a scrap of soul-revealing talk Mrs. Major drilled into my not very attentive ear. . . . Mrs. Major, I gathered, was pining to “do something,” if only a little. She had been baffled at every turn. . . . I remember one fragment went,

“ . . . I told them I’d be quite, quite willing to look after soldiers, nurse them, you know, take care of them

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in convalescence . . . all I asked was that they would guarantee I was sent *only* officers. . . .”

That fragment of public spirit came away with me. I recall I was not sick at it. I only laughed. She was incurable.

And, there is no gainsaying it, I did take away a picture of Barbara's beauty. I felt a twinge of my old emotion as I watched her singular, slim charm. She seemed thinner, I thought, more coltish, a little hectic, but her Psyche-like perfection was as alluring as of old. And the bobbed hair gave her such a crispness, and the exposed length of slim, silk leg gave her a desirous wildness. She looked poignantly lovely, and her animation—that made her vivid and desirable, too. I didn't feel at ease while the subalterns romped with her. They were taking liberties with something that had been mine.

I did not stay very long, and with a lack of reluctance that impressed me the Majors let me go. I went home, and had twinges of memory all that night. I saw the figure of Barbara, radiant, alluring, and desirable in my dreams. Her new wildness excited me. I might have called again earlier in the day when subalterns did not impinge, but I saw her in a car packed with youth in the best kind of khaki speeding through The Hill. As they passed I heard a thin, dry shriek of laughter from her. . . . I didn't call.

But, surprisingly, Barbara and her mother called on us. On the last day of my leave I returned home from my lunch with Agnes—we had been in Holborn, to Batsford's, to buy all manner of books on cottage architecture—and I found them both in the drawing-room. I thought, at first, it was just an ordinary, polite call on my mother. Then abruptly I realized the reason—Sir Henry Keenan was its inspiration.

I was rather tickled. I knew what had happened. The

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grandiloquent gossip that had begun at my mother's tea-table had seeped through to them. I, who had seemed inconspicuous, not really worth the trouble, suddenly shone with the glory of my friend's title . . . they, of course, had an altogether exaggerated idea of my intimacy, in these matters The Hill preferred exaggeration. I was a boon companion, the right-hand man of a baronet. . . . We were going into gigantic schemes together after the war.

My emotion was neither pleasure nor contempt, it was mere amusement.

When I found what they were at, I feigned an indifference just for the pleasure of drawing Mrs. Major out. When she said, "He's a most charming young man, I hear," I admitted that he wasn't a bad sort. When she cried, "They tell me he has a 'lovely' place in Sussex," I merely said,

"Has he? I've never been there."

With her point blunted, she swung round on my mother and gave way to description.

"Oh, yes . . . I hear it's a most *beautiful* place. Young Mollison, one of the dear boys who comes to see me—we do what we can, you know, for the dear boys, you know—knows it quite well. It is a *very* big estate, in lovely country. Young Mollison says that Sir Henry must be one of the richest landowners in the south of England . . . the richest . . . oh, very wealthy . . . and of such an old and good family. . . . And you are a friend of his, Donald?" She had swung round to me. "How *nice* for you."

Well, yes, I did hate her for that *nice*; a man, even if amused, has his pride.

"Oh, I came across him in France," I said in my airy way. "When I came away the acquaintance was broken off—that's the way in the army. . . ." I meant to sug-

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gest that my chapter with Keenan had been closed. My mother said,

"He writes to Donald," her aim being to show that the chapter was far from closed. Mrs. Major said that that was also "nice." I think she realized, too, that I was difficult. She turned to my mother and left me to Barbara.

Barbara enfolded me with the bold vivacity which was part of her new rôle. She huddled up beside me, her legs on the sofa with a sort of deliberate unconcern of her silken shins or of the enticement of the deep "V" in her blouse.

"Deep old Donald," she said. "That's why you fought shy of us."

Her smile and her lifted chin, the old trick which now, not merely revealed the long throat, but enticed the gaze to allures but half-withheld in the depths of that "V," seemed a flame of vivid gayety. And the flame touched me; it was with raillery rather than with resentment that I answered,

"And why did I fight shy of you?"

"Oh, you have your Sir Henrys to think about *now*."

"Only one of them," I laughed. "And if you think that because one meets a man very casually in France . . ."

"Oh, we've heard all about *that*," she answered, and her tone played on my self-esteem. "We've heard of the tremendous things you are going to do together."

"Are we?" I asked. "Well, I've heard nothing of what we're going to do together."

She caught hold of my hair, playfully, and pulled it with a gesture that was a caress rather than a punishment for what she considered my deliberate ambiguity. And she allowed her fingers to remain, stirring gently over my temple.

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"Stuff," she laughed. "What about all this housing?"

I was both pleased, and on my defense.

"The housing means nothing," I said, and I deliberately fired a shot at her. "We just found that we have the same sort of keenness about—cottages."

Did she wince at cottages? Not palpably. No doubt, cottages connected with baronets didn't seem so trivial to her as cottages without a title. And she may have felt that cottages were a mere step to higher glories.

She said, indeed, that cottages were rather swizz. She said she loved the idea of a young landowner doing "all that" for his people. . . . But then, of course, he was awfully rich, and could do those things. She asked me about him, whether he was really young. And good-looking. Whether his wealth wasn't terrible. Whether he was a good sport. Whether he was gay. We slipped deeply into talk, and soon I was showing her some of the books Agnes and I had bought, giving her little lessons in cottages, their prettiness and construction, their significance in the Keenan ideal.

And all the time I was more conscious of her beside me than I was of the cottages we saw in the pages on my lap. It was not merely that the exquisite perfection of her physical side assaulted my senses, but she, herself, now seemed to force that side upon me. As we looked down at the books she crouched close up to me; I was acutely aware of the flimsiness of her garments—garments which seemed deliberately to call attention to their flimsiness and vulnerability. . . . And as we sat she slipped her hand up to my neck, and ran her fingers down between my collar and skin. . . .

Certainly my leave left me with mixed emotions. The attitude of *The Hill* had filled me with amusement at its shallow and resolute pretense. My reunion with Agnes had been a clear and serene satisfaction rising superior

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to anything I had imagined in our intercourse in letters, and Barbara. . . . I was both attracted and repelled by Barbara, both embarrassed and enticed. She was so shallow and so exquisite. She seemed to offer so much, and yet the very boldness of her offering frightened. She had changed certainly, but the change was the sort of change that adapted itself, that was powerfully appealing in war. Her unrecking, high gayety, her half-veiled surrendering to the physical—it was the sort of vivid recklessness that fitted in with the reckless emotions of the day. But assuredly I felt her allure.

I went back to Farnborough pleased that I had agreed to write to her, and at Farnborough there was Keenan.

CHAPTER VII

I

I DID not know Keenan was in England until he called out to me from a motor car on the South Farnborough road. I saluted this car as it came towards me, and only at the shout "Sergeant, Sergeant Harbour," did I turn back and find Keenan, looking very pleased and excited, hanging over the side.

"Was going to start hunting for you to-morrow," he said. "Only arrived two days ago myself. Been conferencing at Adastral House. Something in the air; I've been recalled to take part. I'll go into all this later. Where are you—oh, the old Malplaquet Lines, I know. . . . All right, I'll pull some wires and get you along to talk. . . . Oh, how's the bronchii?"

That was the first hint of the Canadian trip. Next day Keenan had me along, and told me all about it. Canada was starting an air force of its own, and the R.F.C. was sending officers, instructors and mechanics to help them build up an organization. The first party had left in January (this was 1917). I knew, of course, that this was happening. Men had been posted from Farnborough to Canada, and I had heard of it. Keenan had heard of the new movement, and had made up his mind to be in it.

"If what I hear is true, Harbour, they understand housing and all that sort of thing better than we do, and I want to look—see."

With his usual ability to pull wires, he had managed

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to be included in a new draft that was sailing for Canada. He had come home at express speed to get ready. He had resolved, from the first, to get my name added to the party.

And he did. He rescued me, only by the skin of his (or my) teeth from being sent to Palestine, he told me, and got me posted to his draft instead. We sailed in May, and in time arrived at the Leaside flying ground just outside Toronto, after having first worked for a spell at Long Branch, a little further out from that city.

We had been able to talk little enough of our dreams on the voyage across, for traveling separated us, but Canada, and especially Toronto, filled us with a new flame, and our old zest took spurt. We had found and exchanged thrills of pleasure at the sight of the many comely houses we saw in the Dominion, symmetrical and pretty houses, with their broad porches, the novel charm of their colonial style, their sense of appropriateness and simplicity. We had already found many points of novelty. The way blocks of ice were left on the doorstep with the milk. The unfailing presence of porcelain baths and running taps in connection with hotel bedrooms (Keenan's contribution), the individual letter-boxes placed on posts outside every country estate, with a swinging arm that allowed the postman to collect or deliver into them without dismounting from his cart. We had admired the universal habit of "hardwood" (parquet) flooring. We had already, that is, in the very early days of our stay, come to appreciate the fact that we were in a continent that thought hard and actively concerning the problem of the home. And while I was still warm with the first glow of this emotion, Keenan came to me one afternoon, and said,

"We're going for a joy-ride in this Pip Emma. Chuck

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your work, Donald" (Canada had already given us an intimacy). "Come along."

Purposely he gave no hint to me, but bundled me into the McLaughlin car that had been put at his disposal, in a way to forbid questions. The driver already had his instructions. He was a Canadian, and he swung us over the corrugated earth roads at a pace only realizable by a Canadian. We struck at Toronto from the camp, swept amid some trees, and presently burst, almost with a shock, into a city of beauty.

At the first house, and my first gasp, Keenan shouted to the driver, "Go slow," and through winding and beautiful avenues we went slow.

We were in a district of fairyland homes. The sun was strong, clear and golden, and the trees had the poignant green of spring, and amid the trees, beautifully proportioned and soft in color and design were the houses. Each house was a little gem in domestic architecture. Each was so graceful, so distinctive in charm. There were all varieties, nearly all with the characteristic colonial porch, many with stone, brick or wooden pillars supporting the roofs of the porches, their quaint gables and bays, roof lines strange and new and dormers of blessed ingenuity. But the mere architectural snap and delight of these buildings was nothing to the comfort and graciousness of their effect on the eye. They *looked* homes, they looked charming, they looked places delightful to live in. . . . And they stood there dappled by the sunlight amid the trees that formed so dainty a setting to their glowing and comely walls. Running right up to the walls from the very curbstone was the soft and vivid emerald of lawns, and not a railing, not a wall marred that suave expanse of grass, just a narrow cement footpath between bands of the grass for the passer-by stood between the roadway and these houses. With their trees,

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their shrubs shining with flowers, and the delicious and irrepressible lawns, smooth and gentle, the comely houses might have been built in the heart of an exquisite park—and they were worthy of being built there.

The car wound slowly along the roads that twisted in and out of this idyllic city of homes; each twist brought us something novel, something as quick as a picture to look at . . . a perfect home with deep eaves and quaint and rounded bays; a low house all nooks, as though comfort-loving birds with a sense of beauty had snuggled down there; houses with beautiful sleeping porches; houses with broad pillared verandas with girls as bright as flowers sitting, rocking upon them. In and out among these delightful homes standing graciously amid the smooth grass, seen through the thin trunks of trees and the fret of gold-green leaves we passed slowly, tasting a strong and authentic emotion. Our delight was poignant. I know I sat there so thrilled with pleasure that I braced myself for a jarring note—the inevitable flaw in the ideal that must presently come round the corner. It wasn't fair to expect anything wrought by man to be entirely satisfying. And the shock did not come—some houses sank below the splendid mean, but no house was really unworthy of that delicious place. And when the driver called back "Where now, sir?" I breathed a sigh of relief, I had come through that gorgeous place with unmarred happiness. And I breathed,

"Good Lord, Harry, that was rather wonderful."

Keenan chuckled with satisfaction.

"Oh, it hits you like that, too? I came through it accidentally yesterday, and it was a glorious shock. It's —it, isn't it?"

I nodded. I asked for facts about this little miracle.

"It's called Rosedale, a suburb of Toronto, you know. It was a forest before they opened it up—and when they

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did they treated it with the respect of artists. I've got a wood that could be handled on my place. . . ."

"If you could only do it," I breathed. "But for one man—well, those are damned expensive houses, Harry. The people who built them had a lot of money to spend—and they only built one each at that."

"I know," he grinned ruefully. "Makes one wish one was umpteen times a millionaire, don't it? . . . If my ancestors had only been money-hogs of the most acquisitive kind, what a wallow we'd have, eh? . . . Still it's an idea to bear in mind."

"Rather. I don't think I shall forget this in a hurry. I shall spend a good many hours hereabouts."

After this we went along to other districts of this city where the civic idea seemed so well developed, to those wide, bright areas where the workers had their homes. They appeared a little flat to us after the fine shock of Rosedale, but they were good to look at, and as we examined the houses which seemed to have grown up under the same sense of fitness which had inspired the builders of Rosedale we began to form a very definite plan of how much could be done by taste and care in building.

The matter seemed to be clinched for us when Keenan said one day,

"Practically every one of those working-class homes we saw belongs to the family living in it. They have the deferred-payment faculty very powerfully in Canada. They think along our lines—or we along theirs. It shows what can be done."

II

In Toronto our plans became definite. It was settled that the Keenan estate was to be reorganized on a human and comely basis. It was settled that I was to go in with

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Keenan. And we discussed my part on the candid basis that was part of our ideal.

"Yes, you must come in," Keenan had said as we sat and smoked on the porch outside our office. "You've got the spirit, and your ideas have kick in them. I must have you in on the administration side, in addition to wanting you there, anyhow. About the cottage designing——"

"I'm not satisfied that I can do that," I said stoically, putting my dreams under me and sitting on them, as it were, for the good of the ideal.

"I know," said Keenan, who understood my feelings, "and we can't take you on trust. This silly, muddly old world was made muddly by taking people on trust. Friends were let do things because they were friends. Being a friend doesn't always make for good work—and we're not going to have second-rate stuff just to satisfy emotions of affection. If you can design the cottages we mean to have, that'll be good, and you can take over that side, too. But they'll have to be what we want, if not, we get some one else. I'm determined to be exacting."

"So am I," I said heroically. "No room for sentiment in a matter like this."

"Anyhow, you know what we want, and you're an expert. You'll be able to go over all the designs with a fine-tooth comb. . . . Now there's your pay . . . and your prospects."

I was inclined, in my enthusiasm, to wave pay and prospects aside with a grand gesture. After all Keenan was going to play havoc with his own finances. But he grinned, and echoed me,

"No room for sentiment in a matter like this, Donald. You really have got to think this over carefully."

We became young and ruthlessly solemn at once. Keenan asked decisively how much I had earned with Hall

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Milne and Baddick. I told him that when I had left my income worked out at four hundred and fifty pounds a year, which it had.

"That's your figure then," said he finally, but when a little later he said that I should room in his house, Margaretting, first because I must live on the spot, second because it was a barracks of a place, and it would be folly to keep it all to himself, especially when accommodation would be limited, I promptly knocked one hundred pounds off my yearly pay for housing and keep. . . . Actually when we had started my income was fixed at five hundred pounds a year; Keenan, in his shrewd way, had worked it all out according to the High Cost of Everything, and declared that he would be a sweater if he gave less. "And, in any case, I'm getting you mean cheap," he said.

My "prospects" were supposed to have given me a great deal of hard thinking. I will be fair. I did not think of them at all. I threw Hall Milne and Baddick and the safe and regular job they held for me over the house-tops. My decision was immediate and of the soul. I would not go back to them. I did not even care whether my joining in with Keenan meant a crash or a success. I meant to join him. The only thinking I did was to convince Keenan that going to him would be for my architectural good, that he was actually giving me the chance of doing the things I always meant to do.

"Look here," I said, "if this experiment is a success I shall—on the practical side—come out with something of a name. Others who follow in your footsteps will call me in. . . . I know how people do follow bellwethers. And if I design any cottages, and make a hit with them—well, I know that plenty of people will want their 'novel' cottages designed by me. That's the line of work I have always dreamed of."

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I managed to settle Keenan's practical convictions. But I was not so sure that I had been entirely candid. In fact, I wrote to Agnes, "I have been, perhaps, what you will call an ass," and I told her that I had chucked everything to go in with Keenan. Her answer, "I like asses," thrilled and inspired me. It was a long letter, direct, practical and big-hearted. I remember I was so happy about it that I handed it over to Keenan to read. He read it as we sat together, and I saw his pleasure growing on his face.

"I say, this is a fine girl," he cried, looking up when halfway through, and, then, refusing to listen to my agreement *in extenso*, he plunged back into his reading. When he put it down finally, he said, "That's the sort of girl we want. . . . She's got brain, too, the sort we ought to have working with us. I wonder whether she would join in? . . . The way she sees that this is going to be a long job . . . well, she's hit upon a definite fact that we're only just beginning to grasp."

III

It was, indeed, a fact we were seeing more and more now that our dreams were becoming concrete plans. We were perceiving that the thing we had visioned as a violent revolution was, after the manner of all true revolutions, to be slow in development and growth.

The financial side alone made that imperative. Keenan was a rich man, but to tackle such a scheme as ours in its completeness at once would exhaust his capital in a very short time. Now that we were getting down to facts, we saw that our scheme must be a gradual affair. But it would at the same time be steady. Each year we would do something finished and definite. Each year we would utilize farm profits, land and house rents (or "part

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payments" as we meant them to be) to pay for next year's improvements. Our transport scheme, once we had got it under way, should, we thought, show a turnover that would provide for its own development. Amusements, which would be started with a small "movie" theater, ought to show a profit and begin to pay for its further growth.

We divided up our scheme into Housing, Transport, Amusements. Upon that basis we began to plan our first year's work, trying to get at the maximum we could do in each department. Housing and Amusements came easily to us, we knew and saw what we wanted to do there, but Transport was a difficulty. We knew roughly what we wanted, but when we came to work it out in detail, going over maps of the estate and county, we found what Keenan called "snags."

"It looks as though we've got to get a man for this," he said. "It's one man's job, an expert's. There are too many technicalities for us: running costs, repairs, routes, time-tables, freight-rates, and all that sort of thing. We must find somebody who'll do it and yet fit in."

"One of our sort," I answered, "one who'll get as keen about it as we are, who'll want it to grow and serve our end, as we do. Do you think a fellow like that will be easy to find?"

"Among motor people? I think so. They're a new race, and keen. . . . Have you noticed the automatic petrol pump they have on the curbs before every garage here, fills a tank and registers the amount supplied in a brace of jiffies? Well, that's the sort of thing the motor people are always thinking out; shows they're alive to every chance. We'll have one or more of those—motorists are fond of my roads, we'll tempt them to use the novelty, and help pay for our transport. We'll have those free

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air hoses, too. P'raps we could get a Canadian who is alive to all the new moves."

We didn't get a Canadian. Months after we had shelved the Transport question until further notice I received a letter from my brother Owen. Owen was now quartermaster sergeant of his Army Service Corps unit, and he effervesced motors. The astonishing thing to me was that Owen, who knew nothing of our scheme, had been planning an after-war life of motors for himself curiously akin to our lines. His contact with organization in the A.S.C. had thrilled him to an ideal of motor transport properly handled. He said it was the only way the countryside could be linked up. Given a reasonable group of villages in proximity to several large towns, a man with a faculty for staff work ought to be able to work up a profitable business in running a continuous connection—that is, taking farm and dairy produce, fruit and the like into the towns, and goods for the country consumption on the home journeys. Such a man should also carry passengers. Owen was on fire with his scheme. Motors and the out-o'-door life thrilled him. Also, there was a girl called Ada—vaguely I recalled her as the woolly ankles of that far-away "Day" of my mother's. She, too, was thrilled by motors and the out-o'-doors. She was even now driving a car for one of the ministries. She was not only a soul-mate, but could take her turn at the steering wheel or at running repairs. . . . Anyhow, Owen didn't see himself going back to any blasted insurance office. After the war people in the know should be able to pick up cars and lorries cheap. He had saved some money; he'd get his gratuity; he might even be able to "touch" some one for cash. He didn't mind if he did have to start in a small way, for he guessed he would make a do of it. He'd develop. He'd expand.

I'd rather overlooked Owen. And, even when I got

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that letter I looked at him, not so much as Owen, but as a piece of luck. I handed the letter over to Keenan, and let him digest it.

"Who's Owen?" he asked, and I realized that if I had ever spoken of my brother, it had not been enough to impress his name upon Keenan. "Anyhow, he seems to have the goods. He's got our ideas."

"It's my brother," I said. "Curious that he should be thinking about the things that hold us up."

"I call it lucky. I'm beginning to think it was a stroke of genius getting to know you, Donald. You write to him and see if he bites."

"Making it rather a family affair," I said, afraid of seeming a tuft-hunter.

"Family affair be damned," he said. "If he can do the thing he's the man we want. If he can't, well we won't have him. You know we aren't going to have any passengers. . . . Oh, and if he's cursed independent, tell him he can put his money into it with ours, and can run it on a profit . . . only, tell him, it's not going to be a profiteer profit."

I wrote to Owen. Owen replied later with a decision that reminded me of his old boxing punch. He sent a map. It was a map of that part of Sussex in which Keenan's estate stood. It was neatly marked out in red-ink routes. Owen had utilized a leave, a borrowed government car, and some petrol which I hope was his own, in going carefully over the ground. When Keenan had studied the map and the report Owen had sent he was delighted.

"Owen's a regular fellow," he said; we had all become slightly Canadian. "Look here, there's brain in all this. He's cut out that straight road here because it's a bad hill and a vile surface; his detour takes fifteen minutes longer and saves so much wear and tear and petrol on a full

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load. And the rest of the plotting out shows that he has gone into it not only with drive but with cleverness. . . . And he's caught fire at the idea, too. He says that if I like he will keep his eyes open for likely lorries or cars. I do like. Tell him to do that. I'll write to my agent to meet any demand he makes. We'll want lorries right away for our building material."

IV

There was a war on, of course, and we were, in that summer and autumn of 1917, full of its fluctuations. We were occupied, too, with the excessive business of training the fine and daring material for flying that came to us from all over Canada—and from over the American border, also. If I show a greater concern about our own affairs than about the war, it is not because we were not intensely aware of it, but because this is not a war book and because other people have already—I fancy—dwelt upon the war.

Canada, from our particular point of view, crowded new suggestions upon us. We learned things every day. I remember Keenan returning from a trip to Ottawa full of enthusiasm concerning county clubs, thanks to a fine specimen of that recreative institution the Capital possessed. He described it eagerly,

"The prettiest kind of country building. Bathrooms, dressing-rooms, drying-rooms for damp clothes, perhaps card and billiard rooms; I didn't see 'em, though in ours there will be. And a reading room of a human kind, cozy chairs and magazines and light novels and so on. And big chintz window seats. Round the first floor is a big, broad veranda, with that square trellis-work: plants and flowers twined in it. Plants hanging from the ceiling. We lunched and dined on this veranda; it was like the

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jolliest kind of picnic, without breezes blowing the table cloth into the mayonnaise, or crawly things marching over the plates, or mankind having to crouch down on its hunkers pretending it doesn't miss the chairs. There was a wonderful view through the trees of the blue river and the rapids.

"Well, that's not really the point. I mean it's actually the center of all manner of games. It's a golf headquarters, of course. I think on the lawns about the club house they played bowls. Probably there was tennis, too. Anyhow, what *they* do doesn't matter. The idea's the thing. There's a piece of common handy to both our villages—not good for production, but grassy. Our county club goes up there. We'll make it a real recreation center, grounds for all games round it: cricket, tennis, bowls, football—p'raps golf. But it won't be merely for games—it'll be a real social nucleus. All the cozy rooms that I've talked about for spending odd hours. And that Winter Garden we talked of in France. . . . A stage for performances. A hardwood floor for dancing. And, by Jove, we'll have the 'movie' theater as part of the building . . . in time, that music hall."

"The Casino idea?"

"Just that."

"Isn't it a big order, for two villages, I mean? Will you fill it?"

"We'll fill it with half the county," he cried. "Owen's transport will bring 'em all in. . . . But, naturally, we go slow at first. A small place, used only in the evenings and during the week-end."

That was an idea we discussed and elaborated for weeks. The military condition of Canada being more democratic than Britain, Keenan took me along to Ottawa, and, staying at the Laurier, a revelation in hotel design and comfort, we went across the river to the county

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club on the Saturday and Sunday. I caught Keenan's enthusiasm, and agreed with him that I must "do" a building like that. I thought I would do it better. Actually it was now that I was beginning to itch to get back to a drawing-block—the first touch of my old desire—but when I did start to draw the result was lamentable; I tore the sketch up in a rage.

V

Still the old tingle had come back, and the sight of so many comely houses about me had set me dreaming in design. Vaguely I was feeling the need to create. Actually the impulse did not come until later when I spent a week-end in the autumn at the home of one of the Canadian cadets.

Keenan had gone to Camp Borden on R.F.C. business, and having nothing to do myself, I accepted this boy's invitation—I believe his name was Wharton, but it does not matter.

His home was towards Lake Simcoe, and his people besides living in beautiful country were also rich enough to build a beautiful home in the colonial style.

It was a house of Dutch character, part stucco, part rough stone, the external chimney of stone running right up the building with delightful effect. The deep porch was built up on the rough yellow stone, and the pillars were of the same material. It had long dormers with a steeply pitched gambrel roof and secondary gables. Mr. Wharton (if it was Wharton) was proud of his house, and told me that he had had the design adapted from a place that had attracted him in Pennsylvania. Merely to look at it set my mind dancing.

Inside it was superb. Broad, airy living rooms with beamed ceilings and rough yellow stone fireplaces. A shal-

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low tread staircase curved whitely and luxuriously broad from the big lounge-hall. Hardwood floors shining everywhere, rush mats and good glowing rugs, white walls in many rooms, good plain paneling in others. It was an enrapturing house. It was to me the most perfect thing in homes. It inspired. It stimulated.

And then we were so happy there. We were in the heart of the country, and yet minutes only after our arrival the vivid girls of the household, flashing girls in their crisp, New York styles that gave them a gallant individuality, were on the telephone and, it seemed to me, were calling up the country. And in an hour or so the country began to come in. The people came, one or two in spidery rigs, but most in automobiles, for Ontario has been bitten most severely in a Dominion that has the motor fever in epidemic fashion. Boys and girls—more girls than boys, naturally; there was nothing reluctant about Canada's war service—and fathers and mothers came out of the automobiles and into the house with an exhilarating zest. They had come along to enjoy themselves, and nothing would stop them. They were an exultant, vivid people, kindly and comradely, with the social instinct well developed. There was camaraderie about the whole business from the beginning, no frills, no balancing of social equations, no affectations. They were good company; they "mixed" at once.

But before they came I had spent that hour in that attractive house. I had gone to my bedroom, where, although there was an evening chill in the air, I had been kept at even temperature by the central heating; I had a bath without drafts, or a congealed upper-half for the same reason. The bathroom was my own and the boy cadet's, a little lobby out of my room and leading to his held the porcelain bath, and the standing hot and cold water, perpetual hot water. A tiled lobby, with mirrors

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in the right place for shaving, over the basin, and a washable glass shelf for shaving and tooth kit. There was a long mirror built into the bathroom door.

Then, because I had displayed keenness, I was shown the whole of the house; the mother, like the father, had a candid pride in its comeliness and efficiency.

"This is a labor-saving house," she said. "Servants, like coal, are rare things in Canada. My girls and I do all the chores. . . . We don't like it, and so we find out all the things that save trouble. . . . Hardwood floors, you see, no scrubbing; and they can be polished easily and without going onto your knees. Rounded corners to the rooms, and, also down there, along the floor, no cracks for dirt. Windows swing inward; no climbing outside to clean 'em. Mosquito netting keeps out flies and things in the summer; perhaps it keeps out dust, too; I always hope it does. . . . We've just taken down the loose, swing front door of mosquito wire that keeps flies out in the summer when we must have doors open. Central heating, too—you haven't gotten hold of that yet in the Old Country, but it does save dirt . . . and raking out grates."

"But you've got fires downstairs?"

"That's sentiment," she laughed. "When the snow's thick and the evenings are dark and long, we like to sit round the fire. Gives a sort of comfort. . . . But the central heating's there all the time—and I don't mind admitting that when the temperature goes thirty below we're glad the fires are there. Anyhow, we don't mind paying the price of sentiment; it's mostly wood ash in those grates, and that clean. Wood is used in the open fires. Not the yule-log sentiment, I assure you; coal is too precious; we want all we can get for the furnace—that and the rubbish."

I was taken into the kitchen, which was a revelation in

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labor-saving devices. It was a bright and clean-aired room, sharp with efficiency. There was one of those natty kitchenettes, in which all the things needed for preparing food are ranged within arm's reach on the shelves, and it had great canisters of flour and the like, which discharged a supply at the mere pulling of a lever. Its clean enameled table-top slid away out of sight beneath the shelves when not in use. A mincing machine was clamped ready for action onto the structure. A woman could sit at this kitchenette and prepare all the foodstuffs for the meal, and put them into cooking utensils, taken from the cupboard underneath, without perpetually moving about the room. There was even a small spigot at the end of a flexible pipe from which she could obtain a gentle flow of water for mixing the ingredients.

"It is supposed to save miles of walking," said one of the daughters, who, with overalls superimposed over a New York frock, was working on one of those curiously disconsolate-looking messes that ultimately make attractive eating. "I don't think that's quite true—it saves leagues."

As she spoke she put the final touches to her dish—and pulled the kitchen range towards her.

Yes, astonishing thing, she leaned over to where a cooking apparatus stood on high, thin legs, pulled it and it came rolling towards her on its ball-bearing castors. It was, of course, an electric range, and its flex snaked behind it, but it was undoubtedly convenient. I said,

"Well, you've got the pull over us there. We have little chance for hydro-electricity in England, whereas you have Niagara on the doorstep."

"I don't see why you shouldn't have electricity," laughed the girl; "friend o' mine has a place bang out on the prairies, in Alberta. Miles and miles from the nearest friendly laugh. . . . Well, he runs his own light and

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power off a little gasoline engine. . . . Yep, keeps it in the basement, I do assure you. Lights up his home and his barns, does his dairy-work and his threshing and every blame thing he c'n put it to. If you wanted electricity badly way home, I guess you'd get it all right."

Electricity—that house rioted in it. These people had an electric laundry, with a washer and wringer and irons and drying gear and what not else—the dirty linen, as they showed me, came down through a chute from the upper story. "Saves chambermaid's legs," laughed the other girl, "and as I'm the chambermaid, I'm all for it. With fixed wash-basins and water, lino, electric-vacuum cleaners, and mops we've reduced bedroom floor work to the minimum."

They had an electric sewing machine, too, and a tiny electric "Utility Motor" which could be put on to do a number of little jobs like cleaning knives, burnishing silver and so on. They had an electric freezer, and during the evening I was to reap the fruit of this in the delicious ices that seem indigenous to America. I asked if ice in the country wasn't a difficulty.

"We store it in the ice-house during the winter," said the mother, "just as we store the wood during the summer. We must have ice, you see, to keep the food in the summer. Every house, even an 'apartment' house in the towns, has its ice-house."

It was a delightful kitchen, airy and sharp and free from dirt; the absence of open fires or gas or oil lamps made for this, and also the fact that labor-saving appliances eliminated mess. The floor was of hardwood. I saw that the kitchenette, electric range and sink were all grouped to save walking and labor, and that the sink, in addition to being cunningly arranged to allow greasy water to flow away, was placed at a human height; a woman could work at it without forever bending her back.

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"If you've got to do work, it's up to you to make it as easy and as comfortable as you can," said the mother.

"You don't call this work," I laughed back; "it must be sheer pleasure to do things in a place like this."

"Well, I won't deny you can get a sort of keenness out of it—call it a kind of scientific satisfaction in trying to get the maximum effect from the minimum of effort. It's like discovering a new island to get hold of some good idea or method for reducing labor and time. Me and the girls are always thinking about it; oh, it's not all laziness, it's an excitement with us."

She was Canadian born, and she asked me many questions concerning the handling of ordinary British homes. Her cross-examination was penetrating. She really was, as she might call herself, a scientist in chores, a scientist in housekeeping. When I had told her what I could, she cried,

"Why do they do it?" She meant the British housewives. "How can they endure going on for years like that? It means wear and tear and harsh skins and lines and gray hair. It means years onto their lives; it's one terrible wastage of tissue."

The house excited me, inspired me to emulation. I was filled with a craving to give England such a house, to carry its ideal of beauty and efficiency overseas. And the happiness of the evening that followed fanned that craving until it became a direct incentive to create.

The evening was astonishingly genial. The happy and homely crowd that had turned up filled the place with jollity. They had all come to have a good time; most of them, too, had brought food, dainty, ready-to-serve things to help along the good time, and to save cooking for such a crowd. The old people bustled cheerily getting the "supper" ready. The young ones began to jazz. The rugs and mats were switched away from the hardwood

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floor of the hall. A man took his seat at the automatic piano, and at once everybody was dancing. We couldn't all dance in the hall, so the rugs were bundled up from the sitting-room and the cozy chairs pushed back against the low bookcases and dancing went on there. All danced cheerfully and constantly with the bright abandon of thorough absorption. And when they did not dance, the big cabinet victrola was turned on, and we listened to singers from the Metropolitan Opera House, or to the Symphony Orchestras of New York and Chicago rendering melody in perfection, all this humanly varied by syncopation in all its forms. Some one played a ukulele, and a boy in khaki gave an astonishingly neat sample of the hula-hula. I don't think anybody was dragged forward to sing, though we were all betrayed into chorus when ripe favorites such as "Peaches Down in Georgia" came lilting from piano or gramophone. Certainly nobody recited. In fact nobody did anything they hated doing, or the rest of us would hate listening to. There was an informality and abandon about the party that helped to suppress social nuisances. They were a people loving music and dancing and a good time with the unstudied capacity of children.

VI

When I went up to my room and switched on the electric light—they loved brightness in that house, and there was an abundance of bulbs—I was on fire with the spirit of a perfect evening spent in a perfect house. I could hear the laughter of the jolly "gurrls" ringing through it, and was thrilled with the youthful zest of the middle-aged. The sensation fused into an exultant emotion. I felt here was the idyl of a home.

They put good, human writing tables into the bedrooms

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of American houses, and there was writing paper in the drawer of mine. I sat down to send a cheery impression of it all to Agnes. I seemed to have had an Agnes evening. Somehow the fine independent clarity of her spirit had been part of all my enjoyment. As I wrote to her, "This is the sort of home we must try to build up in England," I was irresistibly impelled to give her a concrete idea of the place I had in mind. I pushed the writing paper aside, chose another sheet, and, as though she were bending over my shoulder, I began to draw.

"What we want, old girl, is something like this," I found myself saying. And feeling, curiously, the sensation of her encouraging pressure on my shoulder, I drew and elaborated the idyl of a home-house in a strange mood of delight. It was a singular mood of exhilaration in which, in a brilliant sense of ease and appositeness and beauty, I conveyed in a drawing the sharp satisfaction that was in me. To draw—it was again that delicious game in which everything came right. Fancy stepped in on the heels of fancy, idea grew up out of idea, there was a certainty and a freedom in the way the design developed under my hand. I put the first paper aside, went at the drawing again with a fresh edge of pleasure, eliminating, fining down, simplifying. It was jolly. I was lyrically happy. I remember looking at my wrist watch after finishing my sketch. "Two-fifteen; Lord, I *must* go to bed," I thought.

I began on the plan.

"I can get all the efficiency tricks they have in this house into a cottage, and better 'em," I decided, just as I had decided I could better a design for a cottage on the lines of this house when I began my drawing. So I worked away at my plan, delighting in the difficulties I overcame with such suave ease, laughing at the fancies for internal coziness and comfort and prettiness that

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sprang without effort or search from my brain. I worked without fatigue, without noticing time, until, at the end of my drawing, the door of physical buoyancy snapped to and I was at once drenched in weariness.

I went to bed at once, slept solidly, and woke up quite fresh. I looked at the drawings of elevation and plan I had made—and did not tear them up. I went down to a breakfast of grape fruit and Jack Frost sausages, and after that spent a day in tearing spirits with my cadet friend and his sisters. Both of them had “boys” overseas; both did not mind flirting in a breezy and honest way. . . .

It was not until the middle of the week that I showed Keenan the sketch I had done. I showed it without comment. Harry received it without comment. He studied the elevation for a few minutes, then got me to explain the plan. Then he looked up with a grin,

“That Miss Gillow of yours is a prophetess,” he said.

“And that means?” I asked, trying not to show my excitement.

“Didn’t she say you’d get back? Well, old thing, you’ve got back.”

“You mean to say you think it’s good?”

“Cut the innocent stuff—*you* know it’s damn good.” Then he hit me in the ribs. “I say, I’m most awful glad. And I bet you’re fit to bust yourself. And doesn’t it just round off things scrumptiously. Of course you’ll take over the designing now, and we won’t have to call in any one else. That’ll be the first cottage.” He looked at it again, “I say, it really is a ripping idea. It’ll be one of the prettiest cottages in England.”

I protested that this was only one design—I might not be able to do others. Keenan would not have his enthusiasm, nor my new exhilaration, blunted.

“No, you’ve got back. I feel certain of that. You’re

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just going on now. Of course, if you do fall down we'll have to suppress you, and get in other people, because we are not on any count going to put up with half-baked ideas. But I don't fancy you're going to fall down for a moment. You're just going ahead."

VII

He was right, as right as Agnes had been. I had got back my enthusiasm for cottages. The old gracious fire was in me again. Incredible and enrapturing as it seemed to me, my first delight in my art had returned. I lived and breathed and dreamed and drew cottages. The exquisite appreciation of their dainty and gracious beauty filled me to the exclusion of all other things. I had recaptured the first, fine, careless rapture. . . . It was a miracle. I do not know when I have ever been happier or more serene.

Agnes had been right; youth and the army and, yes, her faith and encouragement had given me back the gift I had strangled with a sleek ambition, flung away for a tawdry ideal. The complete and drastic rupture of war had wrenched me away from the smug, sham life and its stultifying atmosphere made up of prudence, outward gentility and comfort, an atmosphere where the ideal of "main chance" had confined me to the grooves of the commonplace. War had given me my chance of escape. War had enabled me to free myself from the comfortable and stagnating things. War, for me, meant a new opportunity, just as it must have meant a new opportunity to thousands of young men.

The war—and Agnes—had done this. I understood what she had meant to me. I found a glory in her exquisite "palship."

It was all Agnes now, and we communicated our mutual

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happiness in many lively and satisfying letters—though there was comradeship only in them. Barbara, away from me, was out of my life. She wrote to me. With Keenan so close to me she wrote, as it were, at him through me. She flicked a stream of picture post-card epistles at me . . . spiritually thin and irritating communications. There was a sort of automatic coyness about them. She warned me against the gaudy wickednesses I was supposed to be indulging, against the hectic amusements with siren Canadian girls, playful warnings that seemed to revel in the idea that I was a Don Juan. Nearly all her letters ended, *"Well, be good, and if you can't be good be careful."*

Her mock humility before what she considered my exalted estate made me angry.

"S'pose I can't expect longer letters, though they would be swizz, now that you're so full up with Sir Henry. . . . I mean work, o' course; don't mean you've eaten him whole. Still, good luck. It's awfully splendid to be doing things for him. A boy I met tells me he is awfully well off, and no end of a swell. So it's really frightfully good for you. I am glad you're going to be his right-hand man. (It was your mother who told me this. Not Agnes Gillow. And not you.) It's so nice to be doing what you wanted to do, and with such nice people. . . ."

Her pointed endeavors to show me she was having a "topping time," I didn't mind. She had gone out on Somebody's Sunbeam; she was rather full of cars now, anyhow, the names of them. He was a dream of a boy, and his people were of good carat, I was led to understand, but he was *rather fat*, and she didn't care for mustaches, *"not that his counted even as a tickle. . . ."* Or she had gone to a dance with such a shrieking crowd . . . it had been a *scream* from the moment they left the house until they had to suppress giggles in order to get the

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latch-key in. And Ronnie, whoever-he-was—"would tell us that sort of story, only remembering he was in a mixed congregation too late, and it was painful to save up one's laughs until one got back to the privacy of one's bedroom, though shut your eyes when you come to 'bedroom,' Donny, because I shouldn't mench to you." . . . Again, she had ridden *en pillion* on Clemmy's motor bike, and "where the roads were lonely and the leaves were thick, he'd been rather. . . . Would look for grits in my eye . . . no good telling him that *THAT* wasn't where one got dusty when back of a motor bike . . . silk stockings are na poo for that sort of thing."

Irritating letters, they worried me because I had to answer them. . . . And in them there was a curious veiled looseness that filled me with a slight disgust. It did not need my mother to write to me,

"Really, I should hate to say it of any nice girl, but Barbara Major does seem to have degenerated—in character I mean—during the war. There are times, really, when she seems almost fast. . . ."

Apart from their attitude towards Barbara, my parents took much of her viewpoint concerning my future. Their disappointment at my throwing over Hall Milne and Baddick was swallowed up in the sense of glory attached to Keenan's title. He was so wealthy, he was so well-connected, his people were so nice, and I would mix with them. . . . It was all to my good. I would get to know the *right* people. Keenan's influence would be of inestimable value to my career. My people did not irritate me, as Barbara had done. I smiled at them. It was their manner, the old dears; they couldn't help looking at things like that, and, of course, they couldn't help being keen about my future.

Their letters did me no harm; Barbara's I did not notice and Agnes' were thoroughly stimulating. There was

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a calm strength about her that balanced my elation at "coming back" even as it had balanced my disappointment in the days before I joined up. They were cheerful, practical letters . . . and not Soul's Awakeners. Agnes was never out of touch with the humanities. She told me of her dances—she jazzed whenever she got an opportunity away from her V.A.D. work, and sometimes the V.A.D. work provided the opportunity. She went to plays—she whetted my appetite prodigiously with her talk of "The Three Daughters of M. Dupont;" she read books. She was full of vitality. Her letters to me were the greatest inspiration.

She was one of the primary reasons why this period was so happy. We all—Agnes, Keenan and I—were living with tremendous zest, drawing from each other a splendid emulation. . . : It was now that I was designing without fault. By the beginning of 1918 I had finished preliminary plans of four cottages and had got out designs for our county club. . . . It was good work. Indeed, I think it was more than that, and the way that that county club and the cottages were photographed and reproduced in architectural journals and *Country Life* and other papers supports my peculiar pride in them. . . . And also the clientele they brought me later.

And I, I didn't care whether they showed "the Harbour touch" as they were supposed to do or not. I simply reveled in doing them and reveled in living. There was plenty of work to do, and outside our military day we were full of our own peculiar interests and there was amusement. Toronto is a good town to be happy in, and we made many friends, went to many homes, danced many dances, . . . Keenan fox-trotting with the best of us by the aid of his rubber-tipped stick. We sometimes went to concerts at Massey Hall. Sometimes we went to the theater. We saw a little ice-yachting on the lake; watched

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ice-hockey, the fastest and most exhilarating game on earth. . . . Yes, we were extraordinarily happy.

We should have liked to go down to Texas with the two R.F.C. wings that went to the aid of U.S.A. Signals in building up an American Flying Corps, but we were held at Leaside until the spring. Then, probably because the rumor of the big German advance of 1918 was in the air, we were drafted home—to go to France, we thought, but after a spell at Blandford we went off to another British aërodrome that doesn't matter (Keenan managing to take me along with him), and there we remained until the war was ended, when the magic of Keenan enabled us to be demobilized before 1918 was fully out. . . .

And even that stay in England was full and happy. Apart from occasional leaves, when I saw Agnes, and found her more and more delightful and companionable, we really did get to grips with our future work. Agnes—Agnes again—had the thought of looking well ahead in order to secure building material. Thanks to this, thanks to a rather unprincipled but justifiable assault we made on army cement and such like material that would have gone to build concrete emplacements, trenches and the like, if the armistice had not come, we were able to be ready very soon in the Peace Year to begin our big scheme on Keenan's estate.

CHAPTER VIII

I

AFTER demobilization I spent two weeks at home. We were anxious to get to work at Margaretting at once, for we were redoubtably impatient and could not bear to lose an instant, notwithstanding whole lifetimes of years before us. All the same we did spend those two weeks in London. Keenan because he had to consult amazing quantities of people over the most simple matters, I because I had to help and support him in this. Also, it was merely filial to go home. I wanted to see my parents, but I will admit that in my condition of enthusiasm it was a little irksome; if there had been anything like a good excuse to go down to Sussex, down I should have gone, leaving my visit to some indefinite date.

Perhaps I was unlucky in not having that excuse.

I think that even my parents resented the act of providence that led the Majors to call on the very day that my kit-bag-gorged taxi landed me at the big, irrelevant gate of my home. The reunion was a thing sacred to ourselves, "and there they were stuck," as my mother said afterwards, teeing with genteel, ruminative doggedness, and beaming on me with a sort of heart welcome but once removed from the genuine and quite reckless welcome of my mother. My mother said to me after,

"Donald, did you write to them to tell them you were coming to-day?" Her tone had a slight acidity, as though I had deliberately schemed to spoil her pleasure.

"No," I told her. "I couldn't have done that. I didn't

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know myself for certain until this morning. It was just luck."

Luck or blind providence, there they sat, Mrs. Major adding her soft, gruelly trickles of joy to my mother's rapture, Barbara looking beautiful and talking brightly, and touching me with a subtle affection whenever she could. They were there, part of my home-coming, forming an essential factor in it, indeed, taking from it some of its intimacy as though it were their own proud right. And gradually they thawed the surface of my mother's hostility by talking about Keenan—Keenan with a Sir. It was the old talk. The talk of it being so "nice" for me to be high in his regard, talk of his estate and his riches and the people he knew, things that would be mine, too, by glorious association. It was only a short talk, but there was a definite bite in it. It lasted a few minutes, but in that few minutes much seemed to have happened. Barbara, for instance, had trapped my enthusiasm. A few neat thrusts from Mrs. Major and my mother was boxed off by a barrage of the Keenan's pedigree, his wealth and what not else, and Barbara was saying,

"I do *so* want to see the things you are going to do. It all sounds so frightfully wonderful. I'm dying to hear all about it—and see it too. . . ."

"You won't see much for a year," I said laughing. "It's going to be slow, I'm afraid. We're finding that out. You'd think we were planning a big, public crime from the way people are taking it. If we get up only the first few houses this year we'll be extraordinarily lucky."

"But that's what makes it so awfully interesting—I mean to see things right from the very beginning. . . . What are the first things you are going to do?"

And that, I am afraid, started me off.

Well, I was on fire. Even to people who really did not understand I wanted to enthuse. And Barbara did seem

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to understand. She was looking at me; her slim uprightness, the lean of her deliciously immature body towards me gave her an air of brilliant absorption.

Her face seemed glowing and eager—or I read that eagerness into her delicate prettiness. . . . And, as she listened, eyes attentive, the hovering and reticent smile at the corners of her slightly parted lips, her small chin was up, and my eyes caressed the fine, soft sweep of her throat as it flashed downwards to the fragile hollows, and the faintly discernible roundness of her breasts. . . . And I knew she was, truly, physically exquisite. Then when my enthusiasm ebbed a little under the consciousness that this moment should be entirely my mother's, she caught at my interest again with a vivid, feminine inconsequence,

"How brown and strong you are, Donald. . . . The army has made you so . . . strange . . . a great, big, strong bear. . . . I'm afraid of you, almost. . . ." Her eyes traveled over my face and my body with a lingering physical caress, and they looked into mine with a glance that was both invocatory and enigmatical. It was a glance that was a tribute and a provocation to my manhood . . . a baffling, disturbing, thrilling gaze. . . .

Then with an almost concrete tact Mrs. Major withdrew. She withdrew in stockinged feet, as it were, from the intimate and holy sanctuary of our reunion . . . and we were aware of the clear beauty of her action. . . . They went, and I found that I had promised to go round and tell them all about Canada and take tea, a promise skillfully extracted from my reluctance by my desire not to retard their departing footsteps.

I listened to slightly petulant opinions of my mother concerning the extreme inappropriateness of their presence, and of their staying. I had been huffy and taken aback myself when I had found them planted in the drawing-room, but already I had become indulgent. I

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"What beautiful nonsense have you mad boys been dreaming?"

"No, it's not nonsense. He means it. Really, he does want you—you've got to come along, Agnes."

She shot a glance at me, under her laugh as it were, sizing me up, her luminant and gallant little face quiz-zical and reflective and tender in one. And then,

"You're a star-dreaming pair of—of masculines," she breathed. "Don't you see"—she made a swift change here—"don't you see that a woman in a Utopia is a disaster?"

"Keenan means to have you," I smiled implacably.

"In that great house full of men and men's work?" she smiled, trying to lead my ecstatic innocence to worldly facts.

"You'll be immensely helpful——"

"I'm immensely helpful where I am," she smiled.

"Well, wait until you've seen Keenan. You're going to meet him; we're doing to dine together one evening."

She stopped on the second step of the mephitic building in which law lurked.

"I am glad you've become so young again, Donald," she cried. So she stood poised against the dark background, dynamic and radiant, mature and strong and at the same time superbly virginal; then with her soft laugh, she turned and vanished.

III

Keenan saw Agnes. We dined one night, quite simply, the three of us alone, and we talked and we were happy. Keenan said afterwards,

"She's a splendid chap. . . . We simply must get her along, Donald." And I said confidently, "Of course we must. She's—she's absolutely what we want."

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That was decided. With an air of omnipotence I told her that it was all settled. 'That she would have to come. And she laughed. And she did not come.

We found her inexplicable, disappointing. There were so many factors which seemed to mark her out as a companion and a partner in our ventures, that her refusal seemed to us a defalcation. There was that time, at another dinner, when we were discussing what Keenan called "another snag." He had had a letter from his agent, a stoic and molluscular fellow named Truff, who had from the first recognized that his duty to all the Keenans who had gone before and all the Keenans who might come after ordained he should act as a brake to Harry's mad impulses. For the first time in two generations this good man's mind was wrenched from its calm feudal silt. His hitherto solid brain began to actuate with a singular creeping activity. It was activity of negation. He was, if one forgets what a nuisance he was, an heroic figure. The way he rallied his intelligence was awe-inspiring. He who had never braved the perils of thought, now cerebrated regularly every day and all day. And his virtuosity in hindrance was amazing. He could think of an irrefutable reason why even the most trivial thing could not be done, even while you spoke of the matter. And he would go on producing irrefutable reasons until the thing was accomplished—and even then he did his best to stultify it with grim prophecies.

Agnes had said at the first meeting, for even then he was "snagging" steadily,

"I suppose you can't, or, perhaps, you don't want to get rid of him?"

"No," said Keenan with a worried face. "He's an old servant. He has all the strings in his hands. Until we get some one who knows the estate inside out as he does we can't move without him." He looked meaningly at

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Agnes as he said that. He felt, and I knew he felt, that he knew who could get to understand the estate inside out in very quick time. "At the same time he is honest and dependable. Although he might object to my doing something, he won't put me off with a lie simply to stop me. If I give orders he carries them out—whatever his feelings may be."

In the particular matter I am dealing with, Truff had produced an argument which really did seem irresistible. We were planning to begin on the county club—the first tangible sign of the new state of things. It was also the one building we could go straight ahead with. We were going to tackle some cottages, too, but we would have to wait until we got to Margaretting before we could decide on them. The first small portion of the county club was to go up at once—we wanted to get the cinema in, and something of a nucleus in place by the time of the summer sports. Truff had written plainly that the thing was impossible. There was no labor. Even if Keenan could conjure labor magically from the air the project would be impossible. The local authorities, if not the Ministry of Health, would interfere on the ground that it was a "luxury building."

We already had had our brushes with the infinite variety of authorities who strew difficulties in the path of the idealist and the rogue with an equal lack of discrimination.

We recognized that Truff had played a trump. Keenan was really angry.

"The whole spirit of the thing is bound up in that club. We've got to win our people. We've got to show them that we mean well. We've got to kill the suspicion which, I assure you, Miss Gillow, is a natural instinct in country people. . . . This club was the sort of thing that would draw us all together. . . ."

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"Well," said Agnes, "make them build it themselves."

We both stared at her.

"I mean that," she said. "I remember reading an account in a paper that a clergyman had got a London congregation to build their own church in their spare time. Well, if Londoners can build a church, I think land-workers could build a club."

Keenan looked at me.

"Yes, they could do it," I answered. "With supervision it would be a fairly simple matter."

"Go on, Miss Gillow, tell us what ideas you have."

"Well, simply that they should build it. If you told them it was for themselves, for their own use and enjoyment; that you on your side were willing to provide the site, the grounds for games, the materials, the fittings and all that sort of thing, but that you couldn't provide the labor because there were restrictions. . . . If you told them that the only way to build it was for them to work on it in their spare hours, a sort of after-work hobby, you'd probably get enough sportsmen to carry it through. . . ."

It was a godsend of an idea. We jumped at it at once, and I might say that Agnes was fully justified in her suggestion. When we had "put it up" to the workers on the Margaretting estate, they rose to it like gamesters. It was not merely that the club promised so many advantages to them, but they also reveled in the purely natural joy proper to all human beings in defeating the red-tape merchants.

And it had a further, greater development. Although the first fine enthusiasm of nearly all in the two villages—women as well as men (I mean the younger women particularly)—dwindled somewhat as time went on and the novelty of filling free hours with manual work waned, there yet remained a steady and very useful body of

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workers, who not only carried to a close the building of that portion of the club we had planned for the first year, but were ready and willing to do other things when that work stopped. They had proved themselves capable and reasonable, and they had discovered a pride in their accomplishments as bricklayers, carpenters, slaters and what not else. They had become craftsmen.

When Keenan put before them his great idea of reconstructing or rebuilding their cottages on modern principles, and of accepting their rents in part payment of the freehold of those cottages, they took hold of the scheme with a definite enthusiasm. It was agreed, after a certain amount of discussion, in which these agriculturists showed a considerable amount of shrewdness, that the body of workers should form a guild, electing its own officers. This guild agreed to take over the building or reconstruction of at least the cottages belonging to the members of the guild, leaving us to tackle other cottages when we could and with what labor we could get. The work done by the members of the guild in their free hours was to be reckoned at trade-union rates, and such wages went towards the purchase of the cottage outright. The members had a right to discuss their own designs and any other detail of their houses . . . at first we found them rather conservative in many matters, especially with regard to our labor-saving devices, but we got the wives in and as soon as the novelties began to be appreciated, and our own honesty was understood, we found them extraordinarily alert. The order of building the cottages was, of course, settled by ballot, in which neither Keenan nor I took a hand.

The result of all this was extraordinarily satisfactory. We had enough men in the guild to work on three or four cottages at a time, and with the easier hours of the field laborer now in force we made steady progress. The work

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was good, too. The men took a pride in their skill, and they were working for themselves.

All this arose out of Agnes' suggestion at that dinner, and though I have gone forward to show how well that idea worked out, we did, as we sat at that table, grasp much of its promise. When we had discussed it a little, Keenan cried,

"Miss Gillow, don't you see how valuable you are? Honestly—you must come along and help."

Agnes laughed quietly, but did not answer, and I put in, "Agnes, don't be so stuffy. You must come."

"There's plenty of room in that big barracks of a house of mine."

"There you are," I insisted. "Now, when will you come down?"

"I'll think about it," smiled Agnes, looking at me with a curious softness.

"Ah, that's a promise, anyhow," said Keenan.

Agnes shook her head.

"No, it isn't," she said, "it's not fair to you if you think it is. . . . I won't promise."

"But you will think about it?" cried Keenan.

"I do," she said. "I don't think I will come . . . but then . . . one never knows."

She looked quietly at me as she said that.

IV

There is no denying that Agnes' refusal to join us exasperated me—not violently, for she was always good company when we met, and we met as much as possible, but certainly I felt an undercurrent of irritation and disillusionment. And there was another factor that came between us—she was working in The City. My mornings and afternoons could not always be filled with Keenan

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and our ideal, I could not always be lunching with Agnes, and even when I did there were the afternoons to live through. In the long hours of idleness I had a sense of blankness and frustration. Since most things I wanted to do seemed to have to be done with Agnes, I felt I had nothing to do. When I felt dull there was a vague feeling that it was her fault. No good telling myself that it wasn't her fault, that she had her work to do; I resented the fact that she had work to do, and some of that slight emotion touched my regard for her.

One day I met Barbara and her mother walking up The Hill, and at the mere sight of them recalled my unfulfilled invitation to talk and tea, and was full of compunction. They chid me gently, and I pleaded business and the usual half-lies, and then Mrs. Major supposed I was busy that day. No, I wasn't busy; in fact I was at a loose end. Vaguely Mrs. Major offered tea that afternoon, and I looked at Barbara, and she was indifferent.

She stood slender, fragile, aloof; I felt she was determinedly apathetic, and because I felt that, I was equally determined to break down that pose. What her attitude was did not matter at all, but I felt conscious of a masculine victory when she added a weak invitation to her mother's.

It was a curious afternoon. I went round early because I knew that Mrs. Major had a faculty for lying down. A sister who was going out received me with some surprise, as though my coming was unexpected. She said, "Oh, I was just going out," and then after a moment, "I'll tell Barbara."

Barbara was told, but showed reluctance in coming down to the drawing-room, and the sister, for convention's sake, chatted to me with her hat and coat on. It was one of those spiritless conversations in which one quarries in a barren mind for remarks. In that dialogue of drips

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I gathered the idea that this sister had not known I was coming. That she had to make a lengthy call, and it was really Barbara's call; she was merely acting as substitute since Barbara had declined "the fag" of it. She read nothing into Barbara's action, but I did. I felt that Barbara had stayed at home to meet me. I felt pleasantly thrilled. I recalled her invocatory and enigmatical glance at our meeting on my return home. I learned that, apart from Mrs. Major in the deep sanctuary of her marriage chamber, there would be no one else in the house until after tea. I tingled with the *tête-à-tête* sense, that emotion of excitement and trepidation. . . . Barbara relieved her sister with an air that had a frosty tinge of discreet martyrdom in it.

She was astonishingly pretty. Her fragility, her bobbed hair gave her a touch of childishness that had an added attraction in the mature wisdom that seemed to glance so provocatively from her eyes. She had a dark silk costume that made her throat and face glow with the luster of a pearl, and it made her look both angular and soft. . . . And she was so kind in a well-bred way, and so remote. She was going to perform all the offices her estate required in the presence of a visitor so perfectly, and the room and the world and huge barriers of granite would be between us. She was so exquisite, so close, and so distant. . . . Well, the male in me could only respond in one way. I responded, as she knew I would.

I don't know what we talked about—the most arid commonplaces, I think, but any commonplaces had a vigor, an enthusiasm intended to beat down her reserve. She parried and parried . . . and I warmed to the game. But there seemed no thawing her. The clock and my exhausted enthusiasm were just putting an end to my efforts, when suddenly there was a flash of surrender. . . . What brought us together on the settee, I don't know.

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I think it was some photos of Toronto I had brought, and which she might have looked at serenely in her chair, had not I made it a secret point of victory to show her in the closest intimacy. . . . But there we were on the settee, my shoulder close behind hers, the white uprising of her neck under my eyes, and her bobbed hair close enough to be brushed by my cheek, and we huddled together looking down at views of Rosedale. I talked more than warmly of Rosedale. I told her of the inspiration it had been. And she said evenly, and without looking up,

"You didn't put any of that in your letters."

"Oh—didn't I?" I said, vaguely conciliatory.

"Not in your letters to *me*," she said.

She drew away quickly, her head back and up . . . , the long sweep of her throat curving deliciously downwards into the deep "V" of her blouse, making with the turn of her shoulders a soft and thrilling massing. Her eyes, half-veiled, looked slanting up into mine, reserved yet hurt, searching yet antagonistic. "Not in your letters to me," she said again. "I suppose I wasn't clever enough."

"Don't be silly," I said, with all the conviction I could rally.

"It's true," she said, "you didn't think it worth while."

"What utter rot," I expostulated, "as if I ever dreamed of such a thing."

"But you didn't want to tell me about these things."

I made expostulatory noises.

"You didn't. . . . It was a bore to write to me."

"Oh, I say, that's not true."

"It is," she said. "You know it is. . . . And now when you've come back. . . . You're a pig, Donny. . . ."

She wriggled away from me, or I thought she was wriggling away, and I caught at her. My fingers caught the soft of the arm just above the elbow, and as they held I

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was conscious of the delicacy and warmth about my hand. I strove to capture her other arm, and was conscious of the suppleness of her body as she evaded my grasp. And we strained for mastery and the excitement made me breathless; we looked close into each other's face, and she said, "No, I won't let you—not *now*. No, go away . . . you are a pig, Donny." And there was that which was soft, possessive in her voice which gave the struggle a personality, like a lover's reunion, and inspired and stimulated, and made me redouble my efforts. A thrill had captured me, a recklessness had made me heady; I snatched at her shoulder with a rough, dominating hand, my fingers closed on her slim flesh under the impalpable garment; I drew her roughly towards me, and teacups rattled. . . .

"Don't," she breathed, "don't . . . look out. . . . Some one's coming." Her very whisper—it gave me a sense of peculiar intimacy.

I let her go at once. I let her go with the gesture of the hunter robbed of his prey. . . . What I had intended to do, I don't for the life of me know. I simply had had the instinct to clutch her, wrestle with her, as it were; perhaps it was merely an instinct to shut her up by physical means since I had nothing to say, perhaps it was merely an instinct to shake her . . . but I let her go and we stared at each other from the polar caps of the settee, a little breathless, a little flushed, with the feelings of the hunter and the prey frustrated in their delicious vocation of hunting and being preyed upon. . . . I was smiling, as a man smiles when, for the life of him, he doesn't know what to do at a crisis, Barbara looking, aloof and rueful and hurt, chin up, lip-corners down, an attitude that might mean tears or nothing. . . . And as the teacups came in I cried cheerily, to brazen it out,

"You know—you're entirely mistaken."

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"I'm not," she said, softly, "I'm not—you know writing to me bored you. You know you didn't *care*."

"Oh, I say," I growled, "you can't possibly say that."

She slipped her hand under her blouse, felt her shoulder tenderly; an abrupt, a stunning change came over her.

"You great big bear of a man," she said, with a sort of reluctant admiration, and in a voice pitched low so that the maid should not hear. . . . "Fingers like iron. . . . I'm bruised already. . . ."

And I exulted in my strength. . . .

And during the tea with her mother the dominating male in me was stimulated. Barbara recovered some of her good spirits, and her bruised shoulder became a secret joke. A wriggle now and then of the apparently damaged body drew my attention to it, and a rueful yet significant smile underlined the gesture, so that there was the delightful feeling of carrying on something clandestine under the very eyes of her mother. We were on a very personal footing, and when, near the end of the visit, she pouted provocatively,

"Oh, Donald doesn't want to come round and dance on Saturday." Her mother had made the suggestion. I said decisively, "Oh, doesn't he—what time shall I turn up?"

V

It was my last Saturday, and there had been a vague suggestion that Agnes and I should do something. I forgot about this fact. I am afraid I forgot about Agnes in the next two days—although when I saw her in the evenings, and once at lunch, she was the jolly companion as ever, and there was nothing equivocal in our attitude towards each other. But outside the meetings I thought a good deal about Barbara, her slimness and her gestures,

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the sort of flaunting flimsiness about her, and her glances as half veiled as her body was by clothes. The enigma and the promise that seemed part of her gave me a sense of excitement. . . . I had the feeling that but for accidents something—something enrapturing yet fearful might have happened. . . .

On the Friday evening when Agnes and I were discussing the long afternoon of the morrow, I said with genuine concern,

"Oh, Lord, I remember. . . . I promised I'd go along to a kind of dance the Majors are getting up to-morrow evening." My vexation was genuine, because, when I was with Agnes, I really did not want to be anywhere else.

"When is it?" asked Agnes, without the slightest trace of lament.

"Not until about seven. We could go somewhere in the afternoon."

"Yes, we'll go somewhere in the afternoon," she said calmly.

"It was a promise," I explained.

"Of course you'll have to go," she told me.

"I suppose you haven't been asked?" I demanded. She hadn't.

I enjoyed the dance. Barbara was vivid and radiant. And she was more vivid and more radiant when she was with me. We romped and fooled together gorgeously; it really was as though we had some secret intimacy, some secret bond between us.

It was a small party, only two or three other girls and some consciously red-handed youths. It was easy to hide oneself away. . . . My most vivid memory is when Barbara and I hid ourselves away. It was in one of the rooms where gas was being saved. Barbara went into it saying, "It is so much cooler in here. . . ." And pres-

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ently in the froth of our laughing talk, I said, "How's the old shoulder . . . ?"

"Most awfully bruised . . . black and blue. . . ."

"I can't see it," I said boldly.

"Just there," she breathed. Her fingers touched her shoulder. She was in a semi-evening frock, no more than a broad strap of silk passed above her arm. She slipped the strap back. "Just there," she whispered.

"I can't see," I said, and my voice was husky.

"From *that* distance . . . !" she said.

And I bent closer.

I did not see a bruise. I saw her flesh, thin, delicate, pearly, curving in soft round lines as her shoulder, held towards me, drew her body together. It was under my eyes, close. . . . "Where?" I breathed. She brought her shoulder closer. "See," she said almost inaudibly. . . . I bent closer . . . dropped my lips to the cool skin and kissed. . . .

"Silly old bear-man," she said, drawing away after a perceptible moment, and she pushed her fingers through my hair. She straightened, and with a wriggle of her shoulder set the silk in place. . . . And we carried on our joking in rather high voices.

VI

We went down to Margaretting on Monday. We went down with a bubbling keenness, glad to get to grips at last. There was no doubt of my own enthusiasm, but at the same time there was a faint, very faint reluctance at leaving The Hill; there was a thin feverishness of excitement running through my veins. I thought so often of Barbara, of her glances, of that wrestle we had had, of the provocation of her white shoulder, and I felt that if I could only have stayed a week longer in town. . . .

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No, I formulated nothing, I only felt that if I stayed on in town there might have been something extraordinary, something exciting. . . . It was something not at all connected with being in love with Barbara; I did not think about being in love with Barbara. . . . But there it was, the allure of the enigma, the piquancy of so much exquisite beauty that could be daring at times. . . .

My mind was visited by many flashing pictures of Barbara. I did not think of her continuously, but these tiny spots of memory came to me with thrilling twinges. And I remembered with pleasure that I had told her that Margaretting was near Brinbourne, and of hearing her saying, "But we are awfully fond of Brinbourne. Always go there when we can—sometimes for a few weeks to refresh ourselves. Don't be astonished if we walk in on you—*any* old day. We'll probably go down sometime soon."

I was looking forward with a sort of speculation to the day when they would "walk in" on me. The idea had a thrill, but a mixed thrill. I half wanted her to come down and yet I had no particular desire to show Barbara to Keenan. Why, I don't know, save that I felt that she was not the sort to impress my friend.

Margaretting, the house itself, I mean, is a charming place in the Queen Anne style, built with elegance rather than distinction. It was lavish in rooms and landings, all on the spacious side. Keenan looked at that house with a relentless H.Q. eye. He was for ripping all the solid but august furniture from the great drawing-room in order to turn it into an office.

"What's the good of it?" he asked. "I mean as it is—look at it; just to come into it makes me tired."

"That's when we'll come into it," I said. "When we're tired. We must sit somewhere, and the good, solid soporificness of this will drive us to bed early."

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"It's got the best light, anyhow."

"It hasn't," I told him. "Billiard rooms always have the best light. . . . And you don't think I could sit down with this Watteauesque wall-paper and draw pretty houses."

"I say, you don't really want the billiard room?" said Keenan, shocked, but striving to be heroic.

I didn't, as a matter of fact, but I had frightened him enough to distract him away from that drawing room. We used a big bedroom on the first floor as an office, with a little room downstairs for seeing those people who could be interviewed without intimacy. Keenan had a bedroom on the first floor near by, and so had I. We used the drawing room and the dining room (and, of course, the billiard room), and were neutral toward the library—but even as it was we felt we were living in a barracks. There were echoing voids of rooms and landings and passages all about us.

We stopped part of that vacuum with Owen. Owen was whipped out of the army as early as possible. He came down in exuberant spirits in a Vauxhall he had persuaded an A.S.C. Pool to part with for a song. Before he had been in the house two hours Keenan and he were at work putting up a punching ball in what had been the schoolroom, since Owen had argued that though Keenan had a game leg and couldn't box, as he wanted to do, that was no reason why he should not take it out of the ball.

"Oh, you think I'm the sort that gets fat," Keenan had jerked.

"You *are* the sort that gets fat," Owen had answered calmly and indicating paintings. "Look at all these ancestors of yours—spheroids, the lot of 'em."

"Oh, I'm not going to be like my ancestors," laughed Keenan.

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"I think so," said Owen, analyzing the other's figure with his eyes. . . . So they had decided on that punching ball, and were friends from that moment.

Owen was a great asset. I don't suppose we could have got a keener man on his own side of the scheme. He had his transport working on the fifth day. On that day he began running three times a day from our two villages to the big town, Brinbourne, on the coast, using a light R.F.C. tender. In addition to this he generally did one and sometimes two journeys a day with a three-ton lorry carrying heavy stuff—at first mainly building material.

But in addition to this he was a splendid help in the general plan. He had, as he said, an instinct for staff-work, and his service with the A.S.C. had trained him to use that instinct. It was a pleasure to get him to work with us on any plan. He was the great eliminator of waste. He was really happy when he was cutting away, saving time and labor and worry and distance.

"Let's get at that superfluous fat," he used to say, and he would go over our scheme, showing how, by doing two apparently separate jobs together they could be bracketed as one, saving men's time, material, haulage and what not else. And when he had pruned and pruned down to the bare essentials, he would say with a chuckle of satisfaction, "Not an ounce of superfluous fat on *that* . . . & a trained-to-the-minute schedule."

And over and above his capacity there was his tremendous spirit, his enthusiasm. He was in this business with a sense of joy. He felt it and was happy about it in every fiber. It was a toy, a game, a wondrous hobby to him. His zest was dynamic. He always had the scheme in his hands, as it were, turning it over and over, examining it, pulling it to pieces to see if he could put it together in a neater, easier, more simplified way—yet

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never offering any advice or suggestion until he felt it justified up to the hilt.

He was vivid and alive, a changed man. I had to look back beyond the days of his moroseness merely to understand how he was the man he now was. He had reverted, indeed, to that buoyant and vital youth when he had boxed and dreamed dreams of a free, vigorous life. . . . He spoke of the change to me.

"This is the sort of thing I was cut out for, Donald," he said. "All that cubby sort of life on The Hill was no good for a chap like me. I was out of it. I felt stuffy and miserable. I didn't feel in the least interested in my work at the insurance office, and at home I felt bottled up. I was about as blue and mopy as a man could be. And I never quite knew why. Doing the things we did, well, they seemed the things to do, yet I was miserable. I didn't understand what was the matter with me until I got into the army."

"That was the shock that opened your eyes. It opened mine."

"Yes, it smashed pretense. It gave one an independence from frills. It made me feel that the only thing that mattered was doing the things I felt I could do best in the best possible way. It taught me that my own opinions about things were the only ones that counted—not what other people thought. . . ." He stopped and grinned at me. "I'm getting a bit out of my depth . . . mixed . . . but I guess you know what I mean."

"I guess I do," I smiled.

For two months, apart from visits to town, week-ends I suddenly seemed to need, the three of us worked at Margaretting. Owen's transport was evenly successful from the beginning, and slowly built itself up to a paying basis and began to give promise of expansion. Our own work was mainly spade work.

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Every morning Keenan and I walked or motored (one of us driving the Vauxhall if Owen was on transport) from the serene house snuggling in its trees under the shoulder of the bare Downs. We struck across the hills or along the valleys to some new point which we were to study, survey and lay out our general ideal. We were subjecting the broad plan we had made in Canada to a test in detail.

VII

It was unattractive and unavoidable work. And though we had not started to build, those months had excellent results. Thus we settled that some cottages should not come down: they were pretty and could be adapted. Some need not be tackled until later. Some must be swept away and entirely new and graceful structures built in place of them. It was in these months, too, that we put Agnes' idea to the test, and the work on the county club was begun. There were no difficulties about that structure. The site of the club was ready, and we had gathered enough material together to begin, and we were able, by making the matter a private one, a personal building for our own pleasure on our own private site, to balk the sedentary ardor of the multitude of hirelings of the modern inquisition—the local and governmental building boards. The guild got busy on this structure, and by the opening of the cricket season we hoped to have the club functioning for that game, as well as for tennis, and the cinema hall would also be about ready.

We were able to defeat red tape in this matter, but in the matter of cottage buildings the mere idea of our wanting to give people comely and efficient homes seemed to be ground for endless battling. The deep, bovine hatred of anybody who shows initiative and idealism that

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lurks in the heart of the British urban councils was encountered at every move. The generosity of Keenan's ideal seemed to breed suspicion and anger. Landowners were, of course, against us. They strove to prove that what we were doing spelled ruin to the country—every improvement since the Magna Charta has spelled ruin to the country, I imagine. And when their anger got beyond statistics they talked about our spoiling the fine, sterling character of the agricultural laborer by coddling that worthy. The local councils had their array of hindrances, and even the labor leaders in the local group began to develop a teasing campaign against us on the grounds that ours was some subtle move of plutocracy for fettering the workingman. This last opposition was our greatest irritation, for, having washed our hands of all parties and coalitions we had rather prided ourselves on our sound, rock-bottom, proletarian souls.

It was an irritating and creeping war we had to fight, against by-laws and obscure parliamentary enactments. Every one of our onslaughts seemed to be smothered by a mobile defense which made us feel that Hindenburg, in constructing his famous system, had had the advantage of a training in the laws and the legal methods of Britain. A break through at any one point simply brought us up against some unforeseen and almost forgotten law of Charles II or Victoria, upon which the lawyers had relied for their second line. It was a harassing game. We had a good lawyer, but however well he might prepare our case, however surely he might smash down the first obstacles, our opponents would fish out of some obscure and dusty pigeon-hole a law that effectually blocked our way, and the whole matter had to be planned afresh.

"Makes one feel that to be a lawyer should be made a criminal offense," Keenan would groan, after one such vexation, and then he went off into a vapor of irritation.

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"I tell you what we want, Donald; we want to scrap all our laws, the whole system, and begin again with a new code. England is littered up with laws. A man can't move for fear of tripping up on hidden statutes, by-laws, restrictions, and half-dead enactments. We're fettered by the ghostly hands of Jacobean parliamentarians. Whatever you do, however well intentioned, there's always a law to prevent your doing it. . . . Think of all the laws that have been passed since Parliament first came into being; they're multitudinous, and on every conceivable subject. . . . And that's the folly of Parliament. It's a law factory full of professionals who feel that their existence is not justified unless they can manufacture legislation. . . . So they spend lives hunting about always for something fresh to make a law about."

"And the worst of the laws," said Owen, "are those sly ones that nobody hears of, that private interests have pushed through without any publicity. . . . Look at the way we are hampered by that sort of thing."

We were hampered, there was no doubt about that, and we came to see that the way of benefactors is hard, but we had our victories. Keenan had an infallible instinct for short cuts, and a gift for work behind the scenes—seemingly the only way to get work done in this England of ours. When there was a hitch with the local council he went straight to the surveyor and said,

"Look here, we aren't anarchists; we don't want to upset anybody; we just want to do the best we, individually, can in reconstruction. . . . I wish you'd come and see what we're trying to do, go into the matter with us. . . . I've got my car here. . . ."

He talked the surveyor into friendliness. What is more, he found out who was *the* man, not the big man, but the man who did things mainly by obstruction or lobbying, on the local council. . . . He was also on the

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Works Committee, and Keenan made a friend of this stalwart, bludgeoning him into a sort of enthusiasm with the blessed word reconstruction.

And as he worked locally, so he worked darkly but successfully in London, turning the implacable fronts of the Board of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, and, later, the Housing and Town Planning Council, by slipping round their flanks and seeing friends, or influential personages to whom friends gave introductions, and winning them over by his charm, his honesty, his craft, his logic, and his frequent insistence that, as with Mr. Lloyd George, his only ideal was to make Britain "a fit country for heroes to live in." He had his successes. Thanks to him some of our houses were numbered among the five thousand of the five hundred thousand promised to be built that year.

VIII

The fact that Keenan had so often to go to town gave me an excuse for going, too. At times he did actually need me to back him up in some technical matter, but more often than not his visits were my excuses. I went up for week-ends and stayed with my parents and saw Agnes and Bee and Hugh and the Majors and the rest, but soon I began to find that midweek visits did not give me the sense of having too many people about me, and so many things to do, and, also, there was more chance of getting an hour excitingly alone with Barbara.

Going up to town was as easy and as unnoticeable as taking to brandy. There was nothing to reproach myself with. If there was a blank day, or a day I thought was reasonably blank, or if there was a hint of something to be done, up I went. There was a train that got me in about eleven-thirty, and I generally scrambled through

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The City in time to have lunch with Agnes. Jolly lunches, not at all blunted when she developed a habit presently of greeting me with,

"Up here again; heavens, haven't you anything to do at Margaretting?"

No, that did not blunt me; we made a joke of it, and somehow Agnes used to flush and look at me in a gentle way and say it with a softness in her voice which deprived it of any sting. Then we used to lose its meaning in a long, splendid talk of the things we were doing at Margaretting, the difficulties and opposition we were overcoming, and nearly always in the talk I would say,

"You don't know how you're wanted down there, Agnes. There's such heaps you could do. It simply piles up and up. . . . We've got a couple of clerks in already, but they want direction, they want an organizer, and Harry and I simply have not the time to give them close attention. . . ."

Only towards the end did she draw attention to the fact that some of the time I was giving to these town visits might be given to the fumbling clerks to the benefit of organization. I didn't see the sting of that. I merely saw an opportunity for saying,

"If these town visits help me to persuade you to come down to Margaretting they'll have been worth while."

She laughed softly, and looked at me with a closeness of attention, and said,

"And if I come down would you still run up to town?"

"No—I don't think so," I answered, but probably not too promptly, for she laughed again.

"I'm afraid you haven't persuaded me—yet," she said. And with a curious determination she blocked all further talk on that line.

They were jolly luncheons; perhaps they were part of the reason why these visits to town were so attractive.

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They always ended too soon. I would protest, "Oh, I say, is time up? We never finish anything properly. If you were only down there there'd be no interruptions."

"There might be time for being bored," she smiled, getting up. "I'm not at all certain whether you could endure endless conversations. . . ."

"Oh, Lord, of course, I could—with you," I blurted.

"With me!" she said, as though startled, and her movement for a moment was held in suspense.

"Of course," I cried, blundering on. "You—you're like a man."

Another pause, a short, a curious, a disappointed pause, then,

"Only I happen to be a woman," she said, and she smiled up at me, and in a moment was entirely herself.

After the lunch I would rush down to The Hill. Sometimes I called first on my mother, but I found that that usually meant a lengthy visit bounded by tea. So in time I went straight to the Majors, and at the Majors there would be an hour or so of that strange, indeterminate excitement that always seemed to be bordering on something electric, and yet was never carried over the borders. I can see those afternoons now as a sort of mush of laughter, romping, lively and over-sprightly conversations carried on at high pressure and by allusion of double and daring meaning (if they had any meaning, really), of occasional *tête-à-têtes* when Barbara was, by turns, distant, provocative, impenetrable, fondling, misunderstood and hurt, almost devastatingly intimate. Always our feet seemed to falter or to hurry—according to her mood—along the steep and thrilling paths that could only end—in what? My mind skidded away from actual definition, just as it played with the allure of the thrilling riskiness of it all. And, in any case, we never reached the end of that path in those afternoons. Some-

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thing always happened. They were afternoons of psychological moments shattered by accident or plan. When I come to think of it, the way that Barbara kept that crisis at arm's length suggests something more than mere coincidence, mere luck. And, anyhow, I did go away with a sense of unfulfilled expectation, with my blood at least throbbing, "Next time . . . next time. . . ."

Of course I was playing with fire, and I knew underneath all I was playing with fire. But blunting that slight feeling of shame was the attraction, the allure of danger, the feeling of splendid, male recklessness, the excitement of curiosity that is an instinct in even the meekest masculine blood. And back of it all was that other masculine emotion, the conviction that I would not be burned, a conviction that has carried countless young men resolutely to disaster in spite of all the records of disasters that strew the world about them. Barbara was a sport, Barbara was rather fun, but presently I would have had enough. . . .

My shame arose from the fact that one day I encountered Agnes after I had left the Majors. She was coming up The Hill from the trams after business, and I had stayed longer than I had intended with Barbara and her mother. She was surprised but cheerful.

"Hullo," she cried. "Thought you were going back by the five o'clock train."

"So I was," I said, and in confusion, "I meant to, only I was kept. I went to see my mother." Then, recollecting in time that to be coming along the street in which Barbara lived did not support this—for we lived in another direction. "After that I called in on the Majors, and—and you know how time slips by."

I really was contrite, I really felt that in some way I had not played straight with Agnes, and when she said, "Well, you can catch the six-thirty-five if you hurry,

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can't you?" in a manner so clearly free from personal feeling, I felt worse. She was so candid and straight-dealing herself that she would not dream of my being underhand.

Still that little shock did pull me up, and for a few weeks I remained stoically at Margaretting, working steadily at our now expanding radius of labor, the club was progressing admirably, the first of the cottages was going up, we had put up a small electric plant, and we had a new windmill pumping water scheme in hand. But my thoughts played around Barbara, and gradually I got into that state of mind in which I told myself that my behavior was childish and stupid . . . what harm was there in calling on old friends? . . . and so on. . . . Barbara wrote often, ingenuous, provocative, lively letters. She was rather fun. . . . When Keenan dragged me up to London to settle some point in the water scheme, I called again, and soon drifted into the old rut.

Perhaps I did more than this. Perhaps, like the dramatist, I did not realize quite how deeply I was involving myself in this business. It was only when Bee and Hugh came down that I was made to learn that the matter was going beyond myself, that it was having an effect on my work and my friendships at Margaretting.

IX

Hugh and Bee came down with their usual vivid sense of impromptu. The building of the cinema hall was so far ahead that we had begun to discuss the details of the nature and scope of the performances. We had already hammered it out on its broad lines, now we tackled some knotty points that had arisen in the arrangements of program, weekly changes and so on. In the course of the conference I had remembered Hugh's connection

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with the cinema, and had written to him, asking if we could call and get some advice from him.

Hugh's retort was to come sweeping down in his motor car. He had just bought a motor car, for one of his war songs had made him, as he declared, a sort of tonic-sol-fa profiteer, and having bought it, and being Hugh, he was glad of any excuse to rush it along at high speed for great distances.

I had been up to town, and heard Cesar Franck issuing from Margaretting as I came back to the house; and went in with a slight embarrassment to find Hugh and Bee and Keenan and Owen and our new electric light obviously very much pleased with each other. Hugh broke off in the middle of an entrancing passage, and cried,

"Hallo, Donald, you look damnably healthy—I say your piano wants tuning pretty badly." He was as invincibly natural as ever, but I noticed there was a jerk about him, a restlessness. The army had not done his nerves any good. Bee, who was obviously on the best of terms with Keenan, said with her old directness by way of greeting,

"Where have *you* been?"

"Oh, in town . . . home," I said, feeling that that covered as much as I need tell her.

"Donald," explained Owen, "is becoming the gay young man of our family. The town and its high spots lure him. He's always dashing up. . . ."

I thought there was an edge to Owen's playful remark. I thought that Keenan looked down at his hands with more than necessary concentration. My mind prickled, as though I scented a sort of alliance against me. There was a pause, which I thought was filled with meaning. Bee, who still had a ruthless persistence, asked,

"How are Mum and Dad?"

"Oh, very fit," I answered, and before I realized what

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I was saying, "I didn't see the Guv'nor, though. I left before he got home." My father got home about five. Bee's eyes went to the clock, I almost saw her mind click in computation . . . well, it was rather late. She looked at me, and the pause had even more meaning, I thought; then Keenan said with an intentional tact,

"Hugh has been just about as helpful as you expected over the 'movie' business." The familiarity of the Christian name did not startle me, we always alluded to "Hugh and Bee."

"Well, why not?" said Hugh. "It all fits in so neatly." He swung round on me. "You can link up with Rockhart—you remember Rockhart, he was the man you built theaters for. He has a place at Brinbourne. I saw him this morning, and he said it can all be easily managed, and he is willing to supply all the reels you want from Brinbourne: change them every half week if need be."

"And Hugh's bullied him into supplying them at a ridiculous figure," laughed Keenan.

"Oh, no, not quite that," said Hugh. "I simply told Rockhart that this was one of the great opportunities in life for not making profit. And when I had talked to him about your scheme, he agreed. . . . Oh, he's not losing, his costs are well covered, and there is a small margin for him. . . . But, you see, he was quite interested. And not merely in what you are out to do, but from his own viewpoint. In the world of 'movies' your experiment may lead to big things. . . . It might be the beginning of linking all the villages of Great Britain in a cinema chain—a big field, and Rockhart doesn't want to miss any chance. . . . He'll come down and see you one of these days and discuss the business."

"And the stuff he'll supply—that'll be up-to-date? We want good, human, modern films, not old, fogged-by-over-

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use wash-outs," said I, mainly because I felt the need of asserting myself.

"That was a point I insisted on," cried Hugh. "As I see it, you have no use for the second-rate. The anything-will-do-to-begin-with idea has killed more good schemes than anything else. You've got to handle this on big, modern lines, and be as metropolitan as circumstances allow. Rockhart sees that, too; as I say, he *is* interested. . . ."

From that point we went into committee, as it were, where we all made suggestions and talked with enthusiasm. Hugh, it was apparent, was as keen as any of us. He flung himself into our ideas with an animation and zest which seemed to make him part of our ideal from the beginning. And he was no mere artist allowing his imagination to flower. That curious and inexplicable shrewdness which underlay all his actions gave all he said a definite value; some of the suggestions he made we added to our plan and they turned out to be particularly useful. Bee was heart and soul in the fine ferment of the discussion, too, but, as usual, she withheld her remarks and only spoke when she had something of almost ruthless pertinence. Their coming, in fact, was stimulating. Their fresh ardor added a new fire to ours which had, I thought, showed not a waning, but a sort of flatness during the last month.

I had, in my mind, put down that sense of flatness to the fact that we were not now dreaming out dreams but working on them, that and the fact that we had to plow through so many difficulties. I had allowed my soul to accept the idea that actual contact with realities rubbed some of the bloom off one's ideals. It was a wise-man-of-the-world attitude. It was the attitude that had helped me to maintain my equanimity in the office of Hall Milne and Baddick, when I found that my dreams were

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not working out. A comfortable, if monotonous satisfaction was the result. I was satisfied in it. . . .

But suddenly I was questioning that satisfaction. The edged remark of Owen, the meaning silence of Keenan had broken through my complacency. Although we ended our discussion and went to bed in a state of high volatility, that remark, and that silence alone out of all the excitements of the evening came to me as I lay awake. Was there something behind that attitude? Were they beginning to become anxious about me? Was I showing a lack of drive? Was, indeed, this, as I thought, inevitable slackness merely the result of my own instability? And then, with a vivid cruelty, which made me sweat between the sheets, the thought came to me: Wasn't I acting as of old; wasn't I sliding back into the old, sleek, self-satisfied manner, the manner that evaded the ardor and the strain of labor and followed the line of ease—ease and pleasure that demanded no effort or resistance?

I lay in bed and sweated and thought, and I said, "Look here, I must cut all this going to town. I must get down to hard work here. . . ."

And I went to sleep and woke and worked on that resolution.

X

And when I was beginning to recover my self-assurance, my self-sufficiency, when the softer part of my mind was again telling me that I was imagining things, that I was getting too touchy, that my fears were childish, that there was no harm in going up to town . . . even in calling on the Majors, I received another shock.

Hugh and Bee, who were to have gone back in their fabulous car on the day after their arrival, stayed on for a week. They had tried to put up at the little hotel in

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the nearest village, but Keenan had triumphed over that, and they had a room in the house. For a week we had music and discussion with an equal enthusiasm, and now, just towards the end of their stay, we were back on our endless talk concerning the amusement side of our scheme.

Hugh and Bee had given a new breath of life to that. Hugh could attack it with a practical knowledge which was outside our radius, and Bee was quite as knowledgeable as her husband, and at times even more direct and acute. We talked of the whole field from the movies to dancing, from concerts to our visioned music hall that would supply entertainment for the whole area in which the estate stood. Owen helped with suggestions on the transport side, Hugh unfolded brisk ideas about linking up with vaudeville circuits, concert party organizations, and so on. . . . His own enthusiasm overtopped ours, he gave a vitality to the idea which was as flesh to our dry bones. And, of course, it became only natural for Keenan to say,

"I say, if you could only handle that side. . . . What about taking it over, yourself?"

"No," said Hugh decisively.

"But, my dear fellow, you're the only one who has a proper grip of it. You could make it go."

"My music comes first," said Hugh.

"But in your spare time?" pleaded Keenan.

"There's no spare time," said Hugh. "My music's an all-time job. . . . I can't do two things. If I took this up it'd simply possess me. I'm not going to allow that to happen. My music is first."

In the silence of disappointment that followed, Bee said,

"Well, I haven't any music."

Keenan sprang at her verbally.

"I say—would you take it over . . . really?"

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"If you didn't object to a woman finishing round in your scheme."

"Mind—" he cried, "why we're always asking—" he pulled up queerly and looked at me, but, having said so much, he went on doggedly—"we're always trying to get Miss Gillow to come down and help. But she won't."

"Of course she wouldn't," said Bee, and she seemed to recognize the correctness of Agnes' attitude at once, which was puzzling. "But I'm different."

"You're willing to take it over?" In this pleasantness we forgot to ask how she was different.

"I should hate your handing it on to any one else," smiled Bee.

"All right—that's settled," Keenan almost shouted.

"But you couldn't bear to live apart from Hugh," I cried, astonished at the swift settlement.

"But she isn't going to," said Hugh with an accent of surprise. "We're coming to live down here."

"What?" I gasped.

"Doctor suggests quiet and grass and an easy life and fresh butter, and all that sort of thing," said Hugh. "The country is what I am supposed to be wanting. Also I rather like the country. There's no need now for me to remain in town, and I'm fed up with it, anyhow."

"But—you're going to live *here*?" I cried, still bewildered by this astounding pair.

"Not exactly here. Not exactly in this house," said Hugh. "We're going to build one. We've seen just the most gorgeous position for it. . . . And you'll do us a design, Donald? I suppose you could find time to do us a good design? You could spare him time for that, couldn't you, Harry?"

And again there was a silence of meaning. Keenan did not immediately respond in agreement. His reticence was marked. And at once I knew the reason. It was not

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because he objected to my designing a house for Bee and Hugh, it was because I myself was showing no inclination towards designing. With a shock it came to me, that I had done nothing—nothing at all—since I had been demobilized. I had dropped my drawing, I had neglected it—I had turned to other things rather than the creation of cottages. And as I realized the shock of this, Keenan said diplomatically,

“Why, of course, if Donald can get a good idea, such a house would fit in. We’ll see. You understand we’re rather strict about house design.”

A guarded statement. A statement with an unintentional edge, yet one that was bound to cut into my self-esteem. The slackness, into which I had slipped unnoting, had been noted by Keenan. My indifference to my work had been noted. The fact that I had not drawn anything fresh (we had merely worked on drawings I had made in Canada and immediately after our return) since I had been demobilized filled him with misgivings. He was on guard—not against me, for we were still the best of friends, but against any uninspired work of mine that might jeopardize the full perfection of his scheme.

I knew exactly how he felt. It came out at me from his diplomatic attitude and words. It came out at me from myself from the knowledge that I had not done any drawing, that I had not lately experienced any of that divine urgency that drove me to creative work. I said to Hugh, trying to be as calm as I could,

“I’ll see what I can do. We’ll look at your site—but in the mix-up, the upheaval of leaving the army and beginning here, the whole exciting churn-up of things, I haven’t been feeling house designing. . . .”

I put the blame onto that, the change, but I knew it was a lie. I knew that my creative impulse had been overlain by other impulses, other preoccupations, and

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that that curious and thrilling preoccupation with Barbara was the reason. And I said to myself,

"Oh, damn, I've been behaving like an idiot. It's time I chucked playing about and settled down to my proper work here."

And for a month and more I settled down doggedly at Margaretting, slogging away at work, refusing to go up to town at all. But there was still a moral gumminess about my mind: the slim, seductive enchantment of Barbara danced before me, and seemed to enervate me, particularly so after her slightly reproachful, slightly provocative, consciously high-spirited letters arrived. Her personality seemed to throw a misting film over the fine brightness of my enthusiasm, blurring it. I was not able to go back to my drawing. And although Bee and Hugh rushed down once or twice in their car I had nothing to offer them.

And, then, in a few weeks' time Barbara and her mother came to Brinbourne.

CHAPTER IX

I

BARBARA sent me a resolutely offhand little note telling me that she and her mother were at Brinbourne, emphasizing the fact that they were alone. She hinted that she would like to see Margaretting and all I was accomplishing there—she put it all to my credit. She explained with less vagueness that if my “vast schemes” did not keep me tied down it would be awfully and tremendously jolly to see me any old day.

Her letter came at a moment when it had definite effect. It acted as a reagent on my discontent. I had kept away from her, and I had begun to feel dull. I think the mere effort of keeping away, that is, particularizing a matter that was, in itself, rather trivial, had irritated me and made me vaguely rebellious. I was conscious that it really was a small affair, and that my inhibition was rather stupid. Workadays were rather flat, too. I felt flat. I knew that Keenan felt that my enthusiasm had gone stale and was preoccupied about it. That filled me with a discomposure which demanded some sort of relief. And, on top of that, at this precise period, our work slowed up, arrived at one of those phases when Keenan had to go up to town, and there was not really enough to occupy us. I was idle, and idling I chafed. And Barbara's letter came.

Owen picked up her letter in searching for some of his own, saw from the writing whom it was from, saw the Brinbourne postmark.

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"Hallo," he said, "the Majors are down here." I read into his tone an antagonism. As I read the letter I had the subconscious feeling that he was thinking that Barbara, unable to get hold of me in town, had come down to get hold of me here. I grew hard, insurgent.

"Yes," I answered. "I understand they come down to Brinbourne pretty often. They're staying in rooms at the Cliff end . . . I'll call on them."

All this was at breakfast, and perhaps Keenan *did* look at me queerly, though that might have been my imagination. I thought he did. I thought he packed into that look all his anxieties connected with my slacking off, my inability to embark on new house designs, my general unsteadiness. I thought I saw the confirmation of many talks over my condition in a glance he threw towards Owen . . . and my soul stiffened. I said,

"I may go to-day—we are rather at a loose end."

I thought that showed my independence, but Keenan pricked that bladder by saying politely,

"Will you be bringing your friends over? We must get a more human kind of tea in if you do."

That was nonplusing. I had no intention of bringing Barbara, and particularly her mother, over. . . . They were so obviously the wrong sort of people to let loose on our ideals. And I felt that Keenan knew my attitude, and so had pointed the moral.

II

I saw Barbara that afternoon, and the whole proceeding was infinitely dull.

I went in on one of Owen's afternoon tenders, a little early, and I walked along that preposterous and dreary Sahara of asphalt that is the ambling ground of pleasure at Brinbourne. It was sprinkled with those jaded souls

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who, tired of doing nothing indoors or on the stretch of ballast that makes the beach, were doing nothing in deck chairs or on their feet by the fringe of the dejected sea and within range and evidence, but not sight, of the open-air fish market under the Parade.

There were not the usual huge crowds that make the Parade Oriental, for the winter season was just tailing off into the summer holidays. But along the front there happened the frequent gleam of jumpers. I liked the jumpers; there was a clean, snappy spring about the young forms inside them, a sense of bravery and naturalness. That is, I liked the jumper as an occasional note of individuality. But, under an accumulation of jumpers, my mind became jaded. There was such a somber reiteration in their liveliness, an eternal sameness. It was as though a bored providence had finished a big and pressing job by running off several hundred thousand jumper figures from a stock mold. There were so many pliant, upright, sapling-like forms in sex-muffling stockinet. There was a sameness about the multitude, the bobbed hair, the tams, the rigorously low necks and the high skirts; the Parade was monotonous in its indomitably exposed shins.

As I walked I became critical.

I fixed my eyes on a slim beauty strolling before me, moving with that slurring gait which showed a mind not altogether unconscious of a more than civilly dressed young man on the steps of the biggest hotel. And as I watched her in her redoubtable ordinariness I wondered,

"Why do they all do it? Why are they all so absolutely and tiresomely trite? Why do they do as every other girl does—automatically, blindly? . . . She has pretty ankles, and that skirt is daring. . . . But when there are so many pretty ankles and every skirt is daring,

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where's the value? Have their minds been turned out of one mold, too? . . ."

The girl looked back, a gesture that gave the superb young man no chance of missing her profile, or the curve of her throat. "And even in that, even the mannerisms of enticement. . . ." I began to think. And I stopped. I had no chance of missing the profile or the curve of the throat.

It was Barbara.

She strolled on, and I hesitated. Not in shock or disgust, I wasn't offended really, because it didn't matter; but I felt, "Is it worth while? . . ." The dreary staleness of our companionship for that afternoon rose in my nostrils. But with a worldly shrug I walked after her, caught her up.

You can gauge my attitude towards her from the fact that I teased her about that gorgeous young man who looked so like a gentleman that he must have been an actor. A bad move, perhaps, for probably the dullness of the afternoon grew up out of that. She was all pretense. She became proper. There was a devastating niceness about her during the whole of the time we sat in deck chairs, or had tea. I suppose she was retrieving that slip. She said it was so nice to meet somebody one knew. . . . Brinbourne was utterly crowded with a lot of "outsiders" . . . bounders . . . they stared so . . . they thought that any girl was fair game. . . .

I suppose, too, I was still feeling the reaction from my defiance at breakfast. I still felt Owen's oblique remark, and Keenan's look; there was a growling of discomfort beneath my surface air all the time and I could not be bright—and we were in public where we had to be decorous. I was not vivacious company. We talked in trickles, with appalling silences in between. Or I talked of work, and felt her to be bored but brave. Subjects

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evaporated, conversations limped. . . . It was all incredibly tedious. With a fervor I had not dreamed of I clutched at the fact that if I did not catch the six-thirty motor I should be late for dinner. And more, I made a banquet, a grim and inexorable ritual of that meal. The heavens would fall if I missed it.

I suppose Barbara deserves a grain of pity. She fought against that dinner. During the afternoon she had been rallying the whole of her conversational items, and, as if they were biscuits, had offered them one by one. My definite statement as to dinner found her unarmed . . . possibly she had lived in the hope that I would ask her and her mother out to dinner. But as I didn't—well, they were in lodgings in which post-war rations and prosperity had given the landlady a post-war independence. There *might* be enough dinner for an extra person, but it was merely faith to hope so. She could do nothing but lure me back towards the lodgings where her mother could be consulted. We walked there in silence, my merely tentative determination to be back at Margaretting by dinner-time hardening into resolve. And at the lodgings she lured me in . . . "to see mother."

And her mother wasn't in.

That was the crown of Barbara's thoroughly unsatisfactory afternoon. She gave way to real vexation, and she took it out of me. She flung away from me, called me a disagreeable beast, and I was forced to apologize. I said I wasn't at all a beast, "I really have to be back."

"It's because you don't want to stay, Donny," she protested.

"I can't actually help myself. Really I've got to go."

"You needn't," she cried. "You know you needn't," she stamped her foot. "I hate you."

She backed away, and I caught hold of her arm. . . . In a flash the old spirit of excitement was with me. I was

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conscious that her mother was not there, that landladies are subterranean of habit, that we were entirely alone. . . . I caught hold of her, and pulled her towards me. Her pliant body stiffened, she was really vexed. And yet not altogether deprived of acuteness. She struggled with a certain lack of decision. I put my other arm about her waist to hold her, thrilling at the springy flexure of her body, and she said at once in a voice, half resentment, half whisper,

"You great bear. . . . You *could* stay, you know, Donny, if you wanted." She had gone abruptly limp, she lay against me, pressed against me, even. I wavered . . . we were blessedly alone, but—but her mother might come in any moment.

"I can stay a few minutes . . . here . . ." I cried.

"That old dinner—you don't *have* to be back."

"Really, you know, I must . . . I'm sorry."

"You're just being an absolute, awful pig," she cried, angry again after her moment of suspension. She stiffened away from me, tried to wriggle away.

"Don't be silly, Barbara. . . ." I cried a little breathlessly. "You know . . . you know one can't help these things."

"You can . . . you can . . . I hate you," she cried. She wrenched herself away, sprang across the room and out of the door. I heard another door on the landing clack to and the vindictive snap of the lock.

I felt a fool, and I felt angry. I felt I had hurt her, and I felt that she had manufactured a crisis out of nothing. I stood foolishly hesitant, wondering whether she would come back, wondering what I should do. Then after three minutes of this indetermination I picked up my hat and with an inexorable mental "All right, then," I left the house.

I felt so perturbed, so angry, so sorry and so foolish

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that I could not face Margaretting just then. I did not go home. I had dinner at a small restaurant, and then caught a train back. I got in, as I had hoped, after everybody had gone to bed.

III

There was a letter from Barbara waiting for me in the hall when I came down the next morning, and it satisfied my mood. I was feeling cheap about the whole affair. That dinner excuse stuck in my mind, I thought of it as an act of ungenerosity that had colored and spoiled the whole of our afternoon. It hadn't been fair to Barbara. . . . I didn't like to feel that I had hurt her. And if she really was angry, then I was cut off from an avenue of amusement.

The letter made the most of this mood. Barbara was humble. She told me she was sorry she had given way to a paddy. She worded the letter to show me that the reason for her anger was that she had looked forward to a jolly evening with me. "You *know* I really don't hate you," she wrote. "And please don't loathe me as a spiteful little cat. . . . Next time, if you want one, I'll show you I'm not really stuffy. Now, do be kind and make a next time. . . ."

As I read the letter I heard voices in the breakfast room. I heard a feminine voice, and I went in quickly, and found Hugh and Bee there. They had motored down with their usual unexpectedness the day before. There was a boisterousness of greeting from the three men that, I thought, covered up a tinge of strain, as though, in a quite kindly manner, they had all been discussing me. But Bee said with her usual ruthlessness,

"What on earth is there in Barbara Major to keep a man occupied until the last train?"

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"As I left Barbara Major at six," I said, abruptly chilled and lofty, "that's a bit of information I can't give you."

I pretended to be unconcerned, but I wasn't. I was woefully conscious of all their eyes. The glow that had been in me froze to something like anger. I knew what they were feeling. They felt that Barbara was getting between me and my work, was taking the edge off my enthusiasm. Of course it was absurd, I ought to laugh at them, and their own senses should tell them that Barbara meant nothing at all. But Bee's omnipotent air and the watchful pause of the others put my back up. . . . Especially when, in answer to Hugh's "And how's Mrs. Major?" a trite sentence merely intended to draw the sting out of the silence, I answered, "Quite fit, I understand. . . . I didn't see her. She was visiting somewhere," I felt that the moral attitude tautened. They felt that I had been deliberately maneuvered into an aloneness with Barbara.

Perhaps I was too sensitive, perhaps I merely imagined . . . but I did feel that they regarded that pretty, amusing and quite ordinary girl with exaggeration, as though she were a huge rock upon which all my ideal would be shattered.

Yes, I became combative, and I am afraid Bee was not the right person to lead me to a more reasonable attitude. Bee, when she felt things, felt them with a detonative ardor. When, after breakfast, she said,

"Come along, Donald, show me all the things you have been doing since we last came down," I knew that she was determined to have things out with me for the good of my soul and in her own manner. And I reacted, I became as stiff and decisive as she.

As we tramped across the heave to the Downs, I rapped, "What on earth brought you rushing down here?"

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"What else?" she asked. "Our house, of course. How's it getting along?"

"It isn't," I told her. "I haven't the idea yet."

"Too busy?" she asked, and I thought her impertinent.

"As a matter of fact we're very slack," I cut back at her.

"Well, then——?"

"There's no 'well then,'" I retorted sharply. "I just haven't got the idea. Do you think one can design houses, the sort of houses we mean to have, like—like turning on a mental tap?"

With her catastrophic feminine obliquity, she simply left that alone, simply went off at a tangent.

"Have you done any houses at all lately?"

"What the devil has that to do with this?" I asked savagely.

"Have you?"

"Well, no," I answered coldly. "I've been a little off designing. . . . One isn't always in the mood. One can't expect a sustained and perpetual inspiration."

"Have you done any since you were demobilized?"

"Why demobilized? Why fix the date precisely?"

"Well, you did a topping house just before you were demobilized."

I knew by that that I had been "talked over." Keenan must have told her that, for I saw no other means of her knowing. Keenan had been worried at the fact that my lively impulse for creative work had lasted up to demobilization, and then had stopped. And it had worried him to see that it had stopped, and he had talked, trying to find explanations. This fact flicked me on the raw, gave me a certain compunction, so that, although I was still angry, I said in a more accommodating tone,

"Well, perhaps you're right. I hadn't noticed with your accuracy. I haven't done anything since I left the

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army. Demobilization, I suppose, was upsetting. One is in a sort of ferment of new beginnings. The change over from the army to civil life . . . to all this, throws one off one's level. It takes time to get back to one's level, it takes time to shake down."

"But are you going the right way to shake down, Donald?" she said more gently.

"Don't you think I am?" I said evasively. Then more candidly, "Say what you want to say out straight, Bee."

We had got to the crest of the Downs. Although we were going to see and take pride in the almost completed club house, we stopped and sat down. Before us the Downs heaved and rolled in solid waves of poignant green. Between the slow bosoms of two hills we saw a flash of the spring sea under the sun; curiously lucent and blue-green. Bee sat with her hands stretched back, looking straight at me, she went straight at me,

"Look here, old thing, don't you feel that you are sliding back into your old manner, the old, easy-going, non-straining, anything-will-do manner?"

"I can't say I'm conscious of it," I answered, trying not to feel stuffy.

"Take it reasonably, Donald, there's a darling," said my sister, putting her hand on my arm; "I know I do spit out things, but it's because I'm really awfully fond of you—and really proud of the things you can do."

I looked at her, she was truly animated and pretty in her round, slightly classic plumpness, and at that moment she did seem a thorough good chum. I caught her affectionate air,

"Yes, I know, Bee, and I do allow myself to get pompous too easily . . . but, truly, it seems to me that a mountain is being made out of a molehill, just now. I feel it, you know, and I become haughty. It seems un-

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reasonable. I know I am a little stale, a little flat. But one does get those phases. I think the whole mix-up accounts for it; the change, the novelty of things down here, the troubles we have had with those idiot people who block our way . . . all that sort of thing. But for the life of me I can't see anything to worry about."

"You think it's only a phase?"

"I hope you think it's only that, too." I smiled back at her. "If it's a settled thing—well, that'd be hell." She was silent, and I felt bound to say, "Don't you think it's a phase?"

"I think it is just now, but——"

"But——?" I insisted. Again she swung away from the point,

"Aren't you seeing rather too much of Barbara Major, Donald?"

The shock of that nearly stung me to a sharp retort; even though I withheld it, something of that feeling crept into my ironic reply.

"So you think that Barbara is the woman in the case, the cause of my deterioration?"

Perhaps Bee swallowed an instinctive and acid rejoinder. There was a pause before she replied. She stared at that vivid and volatile patch of sea.

"Honestly, I do. I don't think there is anything in her——"

"Or in this," I said pointedly.

"But I do think she has an effect. You began to slide away from your enthusiasms, from the things in you, when you first began going about with her." I was ready to protest that my "going about" with Barbara was now on an entirely different plane. I was sure of that. But Bee went on, "Then the war came, gave you your chance, you—you chummed up with Agnes——" She paused, and I winced. Agnes' name touched me on the raw. She

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went on, "And you met Keenan, and you got back all your old enthusiasms. . . . And you did good work, your real work. You did it right up to demobilization. Then you began to go about with Barbara again. You slid away from Agnes. . . ."

"Agnes," I said coldly, "is not here. And I am kept here." There was really my hurt at Agnes' attitude in my tone. "And, anyhow, we write to each other tremendously."

Bee paused as though considering that point. Thought it over, then went back to her original line. "You gravitate to Barbara again—and the old atmosphere is re-created, you slide back to the old, slack, take-things-comfortably, anything-will-do attitude; even the old evading, pompous air of The Hill is creeping back."

She stopped. We both sat silent. I was conscious of an uneasiness, a certain vague hostility—I think the mention of Agnes' name had begot that. I felt that Agnes should not have been brought in—perhaps I was ashamed in the presence of her name. We sat silent until our constraint became marked; it was Bee who spoke at last,

"Well, what do you think?" she asked.

"I think you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick," I said. And after a wait, "I think you are making too much of Barbara. She's rather fun—and we have dull moments here. That's all she means."

"And yet you're getting back to the same old attitude as when Barbara meant a lot to you. . . ." I jumped at that handle.

"You're entirely wrong. I tell you frankly Barbara doesn't mean a lot to me. She doesn't even mean what once she did mean. You really are making too much of this. She's amusing, that's all. I know exactly how I feel about her. . . . And I suppose it's because I'm rather

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dull, have this stale phase that makes her seem rather fun just at present. I suppose a man does crave for woman's companionship. But the things don't connect, really. It's something to do to go and see the Majors—and that's all there is to it."

"Why are they down at Brinbourne?" she demanded.

"Oh, don't see plots and counterplots," I said scornfully. "They come down to Brinbourne because they usually come here for a holiday. You're making it all so confoundedly Machiavellian, and there's not the slightest suggestion of that."

"Do you think Machiavellianism gives suggestions?" she said, with a half-smile. "You're frightfully masculine after all."

"I know what I'm about," I protested.

"I'd feel more assured if you knew what the Majors were about," she said.

"It's not very nice of us to talk of them like this," I said, loftily feeling that there was nothing to be gained in these personalities—and also because I had come to the end of my explanations.

Bee immediately rose.

She began walking, walking towards the club building.

"Take it from me, old thing," I felt it necessary to insist as we strode along, "you really are on the wrong tack. . . . All of you . . . there's really nothing in it."

Bee walked steadily without speaking.

IV

That talk had the effect of making me hold back from visiting Brinbourne, and, at the same time feel that I was dealing with fussy people, well-intentioned but inclined to hamper my independence. I did follow up Bar-

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bara's letter for a day or two, but when she wrote again I responded with a sort of lofty assurance in my own invulnerability . . . she wrote that a film called "Intolerance" was flickering in Brinbourne. She wanted to see it, only "Mother abominates films, and I don't want to go by myself—well, for reasons. Have you seen it, I hear it's so frightfully good? If you haven't—but, there, I suppose you are afraid of another afternoon with a small, bad-tempered cat. . . ."

As much as anything to show that I was not afraid of any sort of cat, bad- or good-tempered, I went.

It wasn't a dull afternoon.

Barbara was certainly not bad-tempered. She was in the most vivacious mood, in tearing spirits, in fact. We joked and scuffled together, a sort of brisk rally in the lodgings before we went to the picture theater; and in the theater we saw the amusing side of the drama and indulged in those small, scrambling, jolly contacts of hands and shoulders one does indulge in in the dark. In one such match in which I proved the stronger, she whispered into my ear, "The great bear . . . he'd clutch me to pieces. . . ." And, because her arm was so close, I slipped my fingers behind it. "It'd be terrible to be squeezed to death . . . and nice," she whispered. And she suited the action to the words, and squeezed my fingers close into her soft body, so that they were imprisoned between the soft fluttering of her breast and the softness of her cool, net-clad arm. "I can squeeze, too," she murmured. "Squeeze away," I jeered softly, and left my fingers there for the space of a reel.

An entirely amusing afternoon, in fact, followed by an amusing tea in which we exchanged the cut and thrust of personalities. Barbara, in fact, seemed to have put all her vapors behind her and was out to have a good time.

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Just as I was leaving her she said, "I suppose you're too scared of my paddy to come to a *matinée* of 'The Chinese Puzzle'? It's frightfully good, and we're going to see it on Saturday. . . ."

Well, after that afternoon it seemed only natural for me to go and book three seats at the theater on my way to the station.

There was nothing in such outings, and they passed the time.

We were still slack. Of course, I could have filled my time by designing houses, Hugh's house, for example, but I wasn't in the mood. I couldn't bring myself to sit down and grind at it. And Barbara's little notes telling me, "There's a dance on at the Swizz Supper Rooms to-morrow, we rather fancied going. What about it?" or "Have you ever been over Archduke Castle? We've just been hearing about it, and it's made us so mad to go that we thought of going next Wednesday. Would you like to come?"—little casual appeals to come along and enjoy myself, like these, were so natural, so tempting that there seemed to be no excuse for not going. And practically always I went, and we had a good time in the best of spirits . . . Barbara's mother entering into the fun of the outing and not bothering us overmuch with her presence, so that we could have our spars and romps unchidden.

They were so enjoyable, so natural that I did not realize how easily I had slipped into the habit of running off to Brinbourne, until one evening, returning after dinner in our last tender of the day, the demobilized A.S.C. man who drove it told me that Hugh and Bee had come down again.

At first I felt uneasy, as though I had been caught in the act by bad luck and that they—or rather Bee, for her talk still played in my mind—would not understand.

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Then I thought, "Dammit, they're always coming down. They were only here a week ago." And at once I realized that it was not a week ago. It was at least three weeks since our talk, possibly more. And as suddenly it came to me how frequently I had been to Brinbourne, how easily and readily I had slipped into that habit—and slipped out of doing anything else that made demands on me. And I recalled that Keenan had been moody, and Owen slightly combative of late. . . .

I confirmed my own opinion that it didn't matter, that it really was rather trivial to make such a fuss about it all; nevertheless, I left the tender so that I could cross the gardens and get into the house from the back. I didn't want to encounter silences, or be entangled in Bee's bothersome arguments.

They were, of course, in the drawing-room, and of course they had the door open; it is one of the bachelor habits of the young. And, since I came in with a diplomatic quietness I heard, not their talk, but burring snatches of things said. And they were talking about me. It was an anxious, after-dinner conference on the backslider.

I did not intend to listen, and in any case I could not hear much, but certain things did come to me. Somebody—Owen I think—said something about "his ever pulling up." And on top of that Keenan certainly made a reference to "Miss Gillow," probably mentioning Agnes' good opinion of me. To that reference Bee struck in acidly, emphasizing the "much too good" ness of Agnes. Keenan apparently persisted, and the voices intermingled, out of which Keenan's voice struck decisively, "I don't know. It seems to me the only chance." Hugh snapped in, "I believe it is." Bee said something curt. . . . And I went upstairs with a human tread. They heard me.

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V

I expected some reference to be made to the matter, the next morning, by Bee, anyhow, and I braced myself to meet it. But nothing happened, and I was rather glad. The fussiness of the thing seemed to be rather stupid. After all I was a grown man, not a child, and really I didn't think it was doing me any harm, I couldn't possibly pour out masterpieces as a tap pours out water. They couldn't expect it. I had done seven good designs for complete cottages, and the club house as a beginning. Well, that wasn't a small order, and, if I hadn't done anything since demobilization, that was only a coincidence. I had, as it were, exhausted the vein, temporarily, with those eight ideas, and I had to wait until I got back the urge, the drive to fresh work. If I had seemed listless, uninterested in our work, well, that was part of the exhaustion, and the worry, too. . . . Really they ought to know that artistic work took it out of one a great deal.

All these thoughts had passed through my head during a disturbed night, and I was ready to meet anything Bee might produce in the way of censure. But Bee was serene, and the others were usual, and calm. . . . Keenan, brooding a little as he had lately, but consciously a bit more alert, satisfied, I thought. In the equableness of that meal I became more tolerant, viewed the matter from their point of view. Since they didn't understand, perhaps it did play on their anxieties that I should be behaving in this way. Worried about me, they naturally connected up this dalliance with Barbara with my staleness. It wasn't accurate, but then why fret them in this way? After all, Barbara wasn't a necessity. I'd drop going in to Brinbourne. Anyhow, so often. After Saturday I'd stop going. I'd stop going from that day—only—well, I'd half promised to go to some sort of special show on the

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Pier on Saturday. I needn't go, of course, only there was no sense in dropping it.

With that decision made, I worked on steadily at Margaretting, and, instead of going into Brinbourne in the evenings, tackled some of the office work I had let slide. . . . How it had accumulated. A few items shoved off each day until some other time—and in a brace of shakes one had a mountain of work.

I said to Keenan,

"I know I've let things accumulate a little, but really, we ought to get additional help; skilled, of course. There's a heap of stuff there that the right person could take off our hands. *We* shouldn't be tied up with it."

"I think so, too," said Keenan. "We need some one badly. We must have help."

He seemed to think something over, then he said casually, "Got anything on this week-end?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have. On Saturday. I could put it off. . . ."

"Oh, Lord, no," he said, "don't do that—as a matter of fact, now I look at it it's a thing I only can do. I spoke without thinking."

I didn't press him for an explanation. Indeed his words were a relief. My three days' absence from Brinbourne had brought a little note from Barbara. It was a comment on my absence, and she underlined her reminder for Saturday. "Even if you are so busy now—I suppose that's what has kept you away?" she wrote, "*you must not* be busy on Saturday. I'm utterly keen on the Pier spree."

With a companionable, "Saturday, is it?" and my equally commonplace rejoinder, "Yes, I'm going to Brinbourne in the evening, some sort of splash on the Pier," we dropped the matter. On the next day, Thursday, Keenan went to London.

That week concentrated on work, my return to steady-

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ness had brought, I thought, a general feeling of easiness. Anyhow, I felt a newer vivacity and serenity about me. Keenan and Owen seemed more settled and cheery, and our companionship and our work became, I fancied, more vivid. Whether I gave this atmosphere out, or they did, I could not tell, but certainly whether because I was giving my work undivided attention, or because they were pleased at my giving it undivided attention, we did seem to swing back to the old zestful comradeship.

And the work really was so absorbing and stimulating. Having cut out anything distracting and flung myself back at it, there were scores of points to catch hold of me, to fire me. I went roughly through the office work. Keenan was going to get help, was he? Well, as I shuffled through that mass, I separated papers, and roughed out on the Corona typewriter a scheme by which it could be adequately and immediately tackled at once by any decently competent person.

Then I tackled the building operations which were going on. The attention I had given to these had latterly been haphazard, I had visited some job every day, but not in order, only as a demand came in that called for my presence. Now I mapped out a schedule, working through the whole of the Margaretting estate from back to end, taking a sector each day. There was a delight in getting that schedule efficient.

I know my plan for Saturday filled me with satisfaction at its neatness. I would go to our new water plant, near the northern boundary of the estate, and close to the furthest of our villages in the morning, thoroughly going into that. Then I would cut across the Downs to where one of our Guild cottages was going up. They would be working on that in the afternoon, while, being Saturday, they would only work at the water plant in the morning. By having a bread and cheese and beer lunch at a pub,

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or even out on the Downs—attractive idea—I could fit in both jobs, and yet catch one of Owen's transport motors at four-thirty, return to the house, and change in time for the six o'clock train to Brinbourne. . . . True, to catch that train I would have to return through the village I had left in the morning, but that couldn't be helped; there was no work there after one.

I was rather proud of that time-table of days, and pinned it up, and was gratified that Keenan studied it. And I carried it out, even though unforeseen things happened.

They began to happen just after I had left the village and the water plant, and began to strike across the Downs. The open-air lunch had been too pleasant to resist, and I was armed with part of a new loaf, a hunk of cheese and a bottle of beer (a long glass in my pocket), and was just climbing a steepish bit of hill, when I heard a motor stop in the road below, and then heard some one shouting. I looked back and saw it was the Vauxhall, and that it was Owen who yelled. As I looked, a girl got out of the car, waved her arm up at me, said something to Owen, and then passed through a gate onto the Downs, climbing towards me.

I looked for the barest moment, and then with a yell I rushed downhill.

It was Agnes.

VI

I dropped the forlorn loaf and cheese and even the bottle, and I caught hold of both her hands, and waggled them, and her, in a sort of jolly frenzy.

"I say," I cried, "but this is absolutely gorgeous. It's so unexpected, and splendid. I say, why didn't you let me know? I had no idea. . . ."

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"If I'd let you know, you'd have waited at the station and not up here. I had half a thought . . . but I'm glad it didn't become a whole one."

She was smiling, happy, and yet I saw a little tremulous, too, a little reserved, even a little fearful. But she looked superb. That singular soft yet vital coloring of hers, that mature youthfulness, that candor of poise never looked more vivid. On the hillside, in the swinging open, and in a day that had the sharp, golden clarity of sunlight, with its shining greens and blues and yellows, she had the air of an exquisite and just figure. I felt that distinctive and radiant as she was in all settings, she had only now stepped against her appropriate background. And my joy at seeing her really was candid. It had been a glorious day. I had been happy, serene, and her coming put a crowning touch to that happiness and serenity.

I still shook her hands in an extravagant genuine boisterousness, and she let me. And I said again,

"But I am enormously glad you've come. It's splendid. And you've got to tell me all about it. . . . Why? I got your letter only yesterday, and there was not a hint in it. Not a hint. You've got to tell me the whole jolly reason. . . ."

"All of it—now?" she smiled.

"I was going over the Downs. But I'll go back. . . ." I stopped, a radiant new idea. "But why shouldn't you come over the Downs?"

"But I want to go over the Downs," she laughed back.

"That's it," I said. And again I stopped. "But, oh Lord, you'll want some lunch. You can't starve. . . ."

She looked down at my scattered parcels.

"Isn't that lunch?" she asked.

"That's my lunch," I said. "Bread and beer and cheese."

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"Bread and beer and cheese," she laughed back. "And isn't there enough for two?"

"No, there isn't," I cried. "Because if you are as hungry as I am. . . . But I know where to get some more, in spite of cheese scarcity. You stay here guarding the cache. . . . I won't be ten minutes." I began to run towards the village. I saw the car below. "Oh, Lord, there's Owen." I began to shout, "Owen, get out of it. We don't want you. . . . Buzz off. . . ." I shouted at the top of my voice, made commanding and lethal gestures.

"Isn't that rather ruthless?" cried Agnes, smiling from her seat beside the loaf.

"I don't care if it is," I laughed back. "And a good lunch waits him at Margaretting, so I'm being kind. . . . Also there is work for him to do this afternoon. . . . By the way, we've got to eat like tramps on the hillside. But I don't think you'll mind that."

"I don't think I will," she laughed, "if something to eat comes soon enough."

VII

It was an altogether glorious afternoon.

We lunched on the breast of that hill where I had sat and talked with Bee, from where one could see that vivid plaque of sea, jade-green and blue. We sat and talked and ate new bread and public house Cheddar and drank beer out of one glass, and enjoyed the view.

"Is it all as beautiful as this?" Agnes asked, looking across the valley and the hill shoulders at that sparkle of sea.

"More beautiful!" I cried. "Wait until you see the club. . . . A breathless site. It's on a small plateau . . . from the terrace there is a view of—of terrific spaciousness. Hills and valley and sea swinging right away to

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the sky line. . . . But you'll see it, and I won't contaminate it with description. The best time to get to it is in the late afternoon. We'll go on after we've seen that cottage. . . . You don't mind more walking? . . ." I suddenly recalled that splash on the Pier at Brinbourne, "we might of course pick up Owen's four-thirty motor carrier. . . ." That was a sort of sop to the Pier engagement. When Agnes said,

"I would rather walk," I must confess I felt pleasure. It was really more appropriate to walk. And perhaps I could get to Brinbourne in time. But Brinbourne was fading into something that was merely a vague nuisance.

"Well, then, before we're sidetracked again by something exciting—what stroke of luck brought you along? Is it a holiday?"

"No," she said with a touch of gravity in her smile. "No, it's work."

"Work?" I cried only half understanding. "I say, you don't really mean? . . ."

"I do," she smiled, and again there was a suggestion of reticence in her air. "Harry Keenan came to see me on Thursday. He said you *must* have some one for the office work."

"But——! Agnes——!" I shouted in delight. "You really do mean—you really are coming to stay?"

"Yes. I gave up my solicitor this morning."

I shouted my delight. Shouted abruptly and meaninglessly. She sat and smiled, still with that look of trouble behind her clear eyes.

"It's quite too splendid for words," I cried. "I can't believe it, yet; that you really have come to stay. It's the one thing we wanted. And Harry persuaded you—right out of hand?"

She seemed to hesitate a little, then looking down at

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her hands folded in the lap of her neat, gray walking skirt, she answered quietly,

"He wouldn't take 'No.' He thought—he insisted on the necessity of my coming down."

"Well, of course, we all have. You're so absolutely a part of this. . . . But, wasn't it a little abrupt? I'm glad it was, but wasn't it. . . . I mean in your letter you said nothing. . . ."

"Harry is rather abrupt," she smiled back. "He refused to wait. He came in on Thursday, after I had written to you and—and insisted. And I gave in." She looked up at me with a soft appealing glance, tremulous and yet happy, "You see I always did want to come. . . ."

"And he made you. . . . I'm so glad he was ruthless. But your old solicitor? Wasn't it a bit of a shock, and how did you manage?"

"Oh . . . his clerk has been demobilized . . . and I was able to find another girl. One of the Ministry girls anxious for a place. He didn't like my going—but I came."

That made the afternoon even more exciting. One with us in enthusiasm, she was now one with us in fact. And because we were an eager lot it seemed to me to be absolutely necessary that she should be shown everything at once, that she should be made completely free of all secrets and plans at once.

We tramped with a sort of buoyant elation across the Downs to the Guild-built cottage, and I told her that this was really going up because of her, because the Guild idea was her suggestion.

And as we poked about at that cottage, looked at it from every angle, talked to the three men who were working at it, who were willing to share their satisfaction in their own handiwork with

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people as interested and keen as we were, I looked at that building with delight.

"I say, but this is coming along well," I breathed, for the building, in spite of its being the result of part-time work, had made that curious jump forward which always seems so startling when one revisits operations after a longish interval. "I designed even better than I knew. This is one of the Canadian ideas and—and I haven't been along here latterly to look at it. And it's just jumped out at me. . . . But, by Jove, I did get hold of something good when I put that on paper. . . ."

I was full of the curious, impersonal delight of the craftsman.

I went round the place, looking at it from all angles, expecting flaws, lines that would let me down, getting a jolly shock when I saw the sharpness and sweetness, the rightness of the thing I had planned. The builder's clerk, whose part in the Guild was to superintend construction, a sure, steady, reliable fellow whose initiative had been crushed out of him by the rules of the game, came over to us smiling, intimating that in spite of the deficiencies of architects, workmen and the rest of a weakling world, the building clerk was pulling the job through. He called my attention to a point in the elevation. He asked me if "I meant that." It wasn't according to building tradition. The usual way to carry that bonding was thus and thus. He illustrated with roughly sketched pencil strokes.

"Can they do it—I mean follow my drawing? It's not beyond them?" No, it was not at all beyond them, only the usual way to carry that bonding was . . . I told him that my way had been decided upon by me because it was the unusual way. And that was the way the thing must be carried out. The clerk did not resent my decision. As it was the habit of building clerks to make

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just such suggestions, so it was their habit to endure just such rebuffs.

As we walked away, Agnes was smiling. Looking at me with analyzing, yet pleased glances, she began,

"You're a different person. . . ." Then she switched that off into, "How you do enjoy all this."

"Yes, I do, but I never quite enjoyed myself so thoroughly as to-day. You're enormously stimulating, Agnes."

"I really believe I am," she said, not with coquetry, but quite candidly, even, I thought, with relief.

"Of course you are," I said, with such enthusiasm that she blushed, and I realized how clearly honest she was, how feminine, how entirely comradely—how entirely my time had been wasted without her here at Margaretting. And as I realized this there suddenly flashed into my head something I would like to show her, something I had kept to myself, hugged to myself, a tiny daydream of my own shared with nobody. I hung tilting on the idea, then I thought, no, it was rather sentimental, and then there was that blessed Pier engagement, or half-engagement. . . . I hadn't really promised.

So I pulled myself away from the idea, by turning round and looking back at the house from the distance we had walked—and again it hit me.

"It is rather good, Agnes," I cried. "I am fearfully proud of it. . . . I don't know how painters and writers, or even songsmiths like Hugh—I must ask Hugh—feel about their work, but I'm damned if they could get a more lyrical emotion than I get when seeing a house of mine growing straight and sure and absolutely right. . . . Do I sound a posing sort of prig, Agnes?"

"I was envying you the feeling. I should like to feel exactly like that myself." Her tone was laughing, but I was suddenly smitten with a qualm,

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"But that means you like it?"

"Like it?" she cried, "Donald, I want to *live* in it."

I laughed in delight. I surrendered at once to the idea that had come into my head just now. I caught hold of her arm, began hurrying her along.

"You are the *most* satisfactory person, Agnes," I cried, "and—and look here, I do particularly want to show you something. It's a secret entirely and utterly my own—only I just must let you into it. . . . You don't mind even an extra walk? The club can be left until a little later . . . it won't hurt."

As for the Pier, I didn't care a rap about the Pier. I might get there, latish, but, oh well, it didn't matter.

VIII

We went over the swell of a hill, talking; eagerly, entrancingly intimate. The world had become a glowing and superb place to live in, and Agnes and I the only fit people in it. There was a curious, sweeping serenity of happiness in me, the sort of happiness that makes children sing madly as they walk—and grown-ups, too. I know I felt like singing. But I couldn't sing for the talk I had to pour out, the talk I had to listen to. . . . Although every now and then I interrupted that talk with the cry,

"But it really is gorgeous, your being down here," or, "It's wonderful that you should be here—that you're going to stay here always."

And it really was more wonderful than I could ever have imagined. The blank weeks that stretched between this and our last meeting seemed to have piled up happiness for this meeting. The release of all that seemed to be sweeping us along on a torrent of immense and yet serene buoyancy. And Agnes, herself, seemed to have

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gained in comradeship, desirability, fineness because of that absence. . . . I knew, actually, she had not. She had the old soft, yet vital and radiant beauty; she had, unchanged, her candid and indomitable carriage, the same directness, clarity and yet fine generosity of mind. No, she had not changed, I saw her with a new vividness, a new poignance. . . . She was the same—but I kept looking at her, looking at her in delight, as though I had never seen her before.

And perhaps I hadn't. . . .

Talking, stopping to look at things that must be pointed out and explained, the walk took a little longer than I had planned. The late spring day was already dying when we came to what I wanted her to see. But I didn't mind that. The day was dying gloriously. Over the swing of the keen-colored sea and the flow of the hills there was the quick, miraculous color that seems to be fluid and shining in its own loveliness, of a perfect Sussex sunset.

We passed over the hill-top, and Agnes gasped at the wonder across the sky, across the sea and the land. And I looked at her, and the color was shining upon her, indeed, seemed part of her, glowing on her face as though it came from within her, rather than from without. From a little lower down the hill, looking up at her as she stood so fluent and straight, her wind-blown skirts giving an air of eager movement, she seemed so natural, so appropriate, so lovely, that I gasped, too. She stood there a figure of all direct, natural and clear ideals. I saw her as she was, a stimulus, an inspiration. My stimulus, my inspiration. I stared up at her, she was adorable. . . .

I knew that for me she was adorable as no other woman had ever been.

Then we went down the easy slope which ran between two shoulders of the Downs. After a little it flattened,

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formed a terrace, a broad terrace, from which it dropped again with a sharper slope, until it expanded and went towards the sea in an ever broadening valley.

We went onto the terrace, and she looked at the view, and I looked at her. And when she had looked a while, I said,

"Well, what do you think of it?"

She looked up at me, and laughed.

"Oh—" she made a little gesture of her hands—"but you see it, too," she said softly.

She sat down, her arms on her knees, and stared along that valley to the sea, taking in every detail.

She took it all in, the splendor, the softness and the breadth of it, the hills, the mellowness of trees, the suavity of the lines where hills resolved into valleys; the humanity of it, the small, warmly colored, gracious houses that gave it comeliness, the winding ribbon of the road—the road that led to Margaretting, the village, its railway station, all the amenities, ridiculously near, yet out of sight. We sat there and saw it all, saw that superb vista blurring, becoming delicate, becoming sweet and soft through a gentleness of tones as the light died down, and we didn't talk very much.

Then when the quiet darkness was upon us, I said,

"You can guess what this means—this terrace fronting that view?"

"It doesn't need much guessing," she said smiling.

"It's a secret I hugged to myself. . . . I dare not show it to Hugh and Bee—especially Bee, they'd chuck that other site, and insist on this. And it isn't for them. . . . You see, the whole thing sprang into my mind on the first day I saw this place. . . . The building square to the view, wings thrown out towards it . . . a little quad to cup that view, you see, where one could sit cut off from the winds . . . though the hills screen east and north,

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anyhow. Then that drop there, cut away just a little to make a real terrace . . . hanging right over the valley. Most of the garden in front, you know . . . to see the whole world from a hanging balcony. A road going round that shoulder to Margaretting and the village stores and all the humdrummeries—quite close, but not intruding. And this house sitting here, not cut off, but yet compact in itself, self-contained. . . .” I began to give her my idea of a house. I had not known it to be so glorious. Talking to her made the idea grow real and living. . . . She was, yes, she always was, an inspiration.

And presently she said,

“It is *the* house.”

“It is *the* house,” I said. “It’s been a dream up to this, but now it’s real, it’s got to be real. . . . It must be, Agnes. . . . Don’t you see. . . ?”

And I caught her hand as she sat there. And I looked into her face. . . . And I saw she saw. . . .

“Oh, Agnes, but I’ve been an awful ass,” I cried, as I caught her to me.

IX

We spent an enchanting week-end. It was compact of happiness, serenity, work, and my old untrammelled and zestful enthusiasm. . . . We talked, and hammered at things together, and looked ahead with all the buoyant optimism that people in our condition look ahead . . . and Agnes was more adorable every minute.

Keenan did not return on Monday—the wretch, having trapped me into sanity, and happiness (for that was the meaning of it all, of his insistence on Agnes’ coming) was a little fearful of returning. When he came back on Tuesday, he had Hugh and Bee to keep him in countenance.

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But there was no need. We were a band of comrades from the moment they came in from the motor. We had a vivacious dinner, and we carried our hilarious spirit away from it. As we went to the drawing-room, I said,

"Do you mind—I want to show you something. . . ." I led them to the working room, to my end of it. "I know you've been wondering if I'd gone back, lost my inspiration. . . . Well, Harry, will you have a look at that—will you pass it for our scheme?"

They crowded about Keenan as he looked down at the elevation drawing of a house on my table. They stared down. Keenan, after a minute, said,

"Yes—I'll pass that."

"You think it—rather good? . . ."

He swung round at me, glowing with delight.

"You—you devil. . . . You know it's more than rather good. It's damnably good. . . . It's—it beats the best thing you've done yet, right out of the field."

They all joined in. They all praised that drawing of a house with wings, and with a little quad between them. They were extravagant in their praise—only, it *was* the best thing I had ever done. I knew it then. The success that my house brought to my career proved it later. And Bee, in her direct way, cried,

"I forgive you, Donald. You've kept us waiting, but it's worth it. There couldn't be any other house. That's the house I want."

"Oh—it isn't your house," I told her.

"But of course it is. . . . Whose else could it be?"

"It's Agnes' house—and mine," I said.

And then they all began to talk again . . . to congratulate us.

THE END

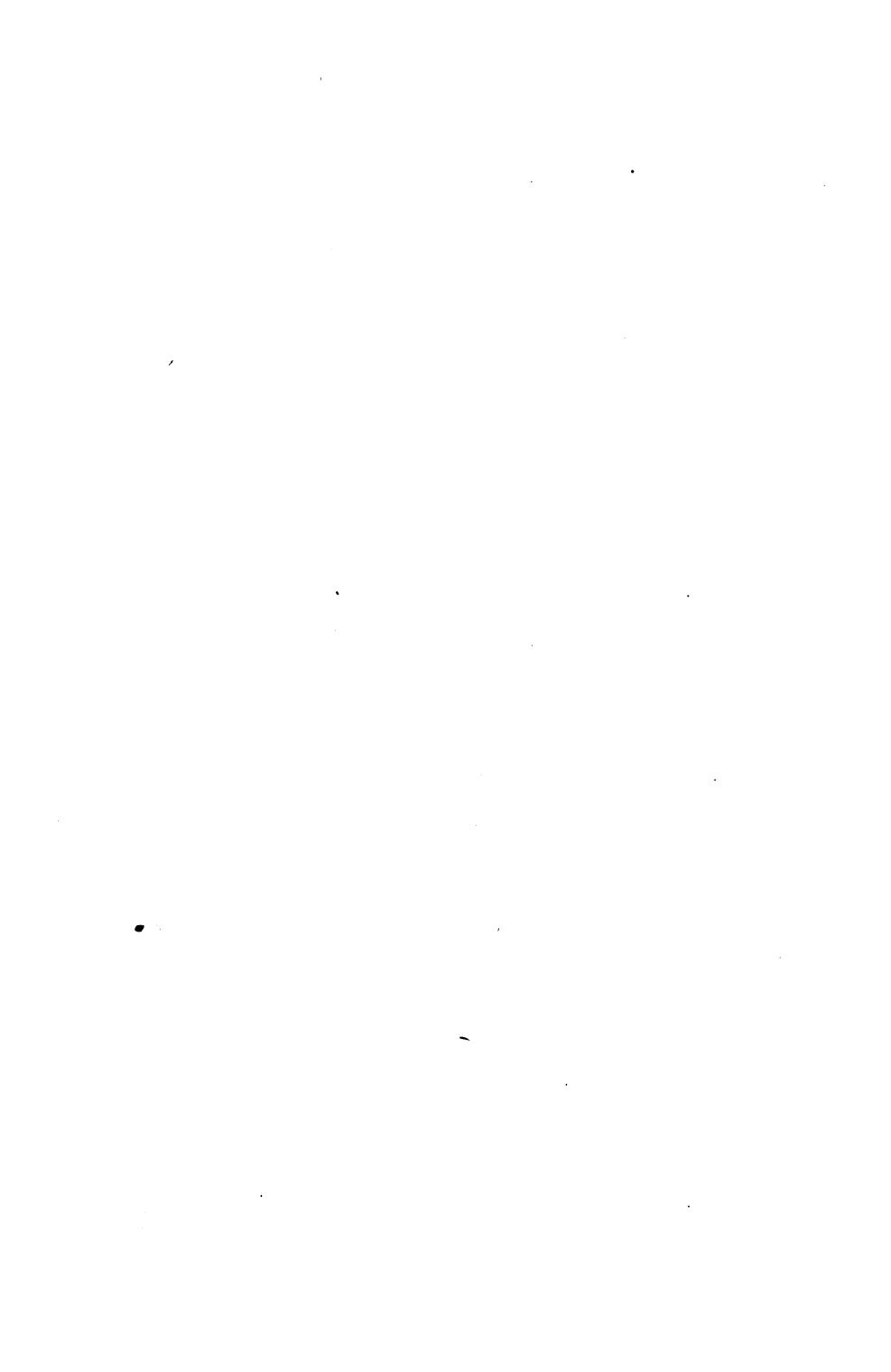
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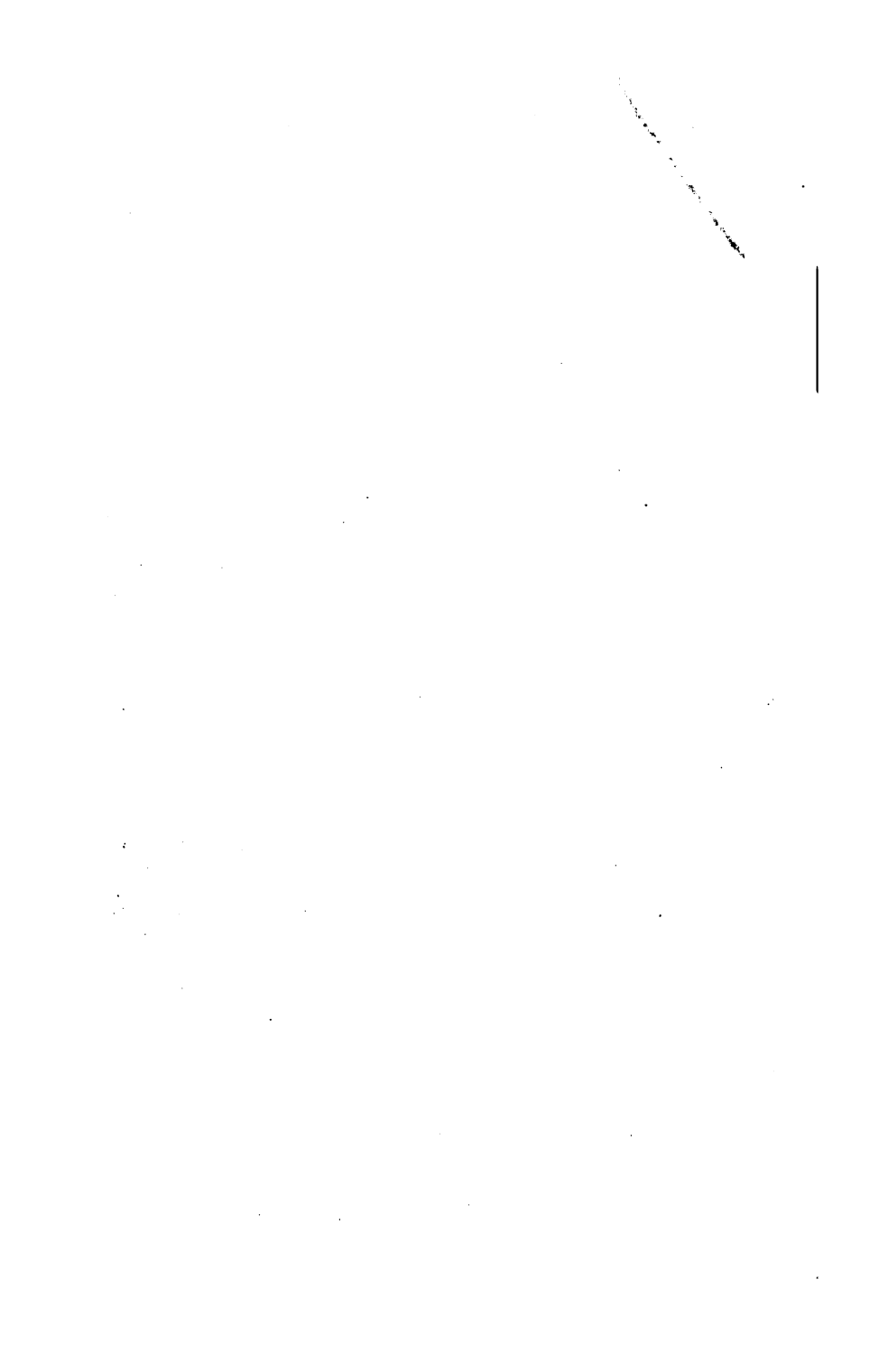
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